

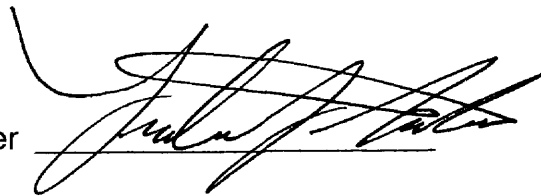
A STUDY OF 1970 NEWBERY AWARD WINNERS:
CENSORSHIP,
REALISM OR RACISM,
AUTHORSHIP AND READERSHIP

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First Reader

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Julia P. Baker', written over a horizontal line.

Second Reader

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PREFACE

As a middle school Language Arts teacher, I find the field of literature to be intensely interesting; however, it is also an extremely vast field of interest. In order to gain a better focus on one small entity of literature, specifically children's literature, I decided upon Newbery Award winning novels for the purpose of this study, selecting ones from the 1970s, with Blacks as main characters.

In Part One, I explore the issues of censorship and the rights of children. Who should select books for children, what are opponents and proponents fighting for, and what laws exist in regards to censorship, are just a few of the topics explored.

Part Two begins with an introduction to racial stereotyping and ethnic bias. After defining the goals of the Newbery Award, five 1970 novels are examined and evaluated based on the presence of Black stereotypes within the novels. Each book review begins with a summary and is followed with observations and personal commentary. The results of this evaluation are not as predicted.

The intent of Part Three is to bring Part One and Part Two together. I begin with a presentation of the award winning books' reflection of past reviews and comments leading to views and perceptions of the novels today. In this section I have incorporated a biographical sketch of the author. Finally, I have given consideration to the audiences of children's books using as a primary source, interviews and surveys of 100 middle school aged students.

PART ONE:

CENSORSHIP ISSUES AND CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Part I is included as a means of building background for research on Newbery Award winning novels for children in Part II. Censorship issues have been prevalent since the 1800s, including the Grimms brothers' fairy tales. In early America, the Puritans did not support Anne Hutchinson's philosophies. Even earlier than that, "Plato encouraged people to burn the writing of Democritus; he also felt the young should be kept from fiction" (Orr, 1990, 127).

Within the last ten years, Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, Madonna, a controversial musician, and Two Live Crew, a rap artist group, have been targets. Censoring of materials is still occurring today in many areas including books, pornography, movies, the internet, free speech. In an editorial, *Killing Books*, the anonymous author stated, "But this new brand of censorship involves parents trying to remove any book, from a bookstore or library, that they find in any way objectionable or contrary to their own lifestyle" (Hornbook, 1994, 132).

"Censorship is the intent of suppressing or banning books, articles, or any other forms of communication" (Orr, 1990, 127). Numerous other definitions for censorship are also available. However, I have defined censoring to occur when an individual looks at, or examines materials, with the intent, or for the purpose, of removing the work, or portion thereof, due to questionable materials as it relates to his/her own ideologies and theology.

Why are groups and individuals advocating the censorship of children's literature? There are a multitude of areas with which censorship advocates are concerned. Nancy Garden, an advocate for acceptance of homosexual themes in books feels, "Kids books have always been prime targets for censors; protecting 'innocent' and 'impressionable' minds from 'evil ideas' is a popular pastime of people- some sincere but others politically motivated" (11).

"A wide variety of books has come under attack from realistic fiction to folklore to poetry," stated reading textbook author, Susan Lehr (4). Within these various forms, people have found a vast array of ideas and themes questionable including issues of objectionable and foul language, satanism, witchcraft, anti-Christian themes, sexuality, homosexuality, anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, anti-family themes, sexism, and racism. "Censorship is not a problem of good versus evil, but 'your' perception of good versus 'my' perception of good" (Lehr, 1995, 4).

"The motives are the same: protecting children from influences that may corrupt them" (Lehr, 1995, 9). The word *may* is significant. According to Nancy Garden, "I wish it were possible to convey to would-be censors that writing about something isn't the same thing as promoting it!" (11). I agree with her wholeheartedly. I do not believe that because a topic is explored that it is being promoted. Many books do explore challenging issues. Censoring these books is not the answer.

FACTIONS

First, I feel it is necessary to discuss the factions that are involved in censorship. It is a mistake to believe that only a small number of people want to ban and censor materials. According to Lee Burrell, of the National Council of

Teachers of English, “Today, hundreds of protesting organizations across the nation have joined forces to denounce the public schools in general and specific books in particular” (19). Organizations including Citizens for Excellence in Education, the American Family Association, the Christian Coalition, Focus on Family, Concerned Women for America, and Eagle Forum are seeking to do just that. Looking at the raw figures, there are over 4.7 million members of such organizations across the nation, with chapters in many states (Library Journal, 1995, 37).¹

In conjunction with such large numbers of conservatives, there are some states that have legislation signed into law, or pending, in support of censoring. Out of nine states with laws listed, five addressed homosexual issues, three addressed obscene or indecent materials, and one was written for family oriented material² (Library Journal, 1995, 37). None had legislation for specifically racial issues; however, without reading the definitions for “pervasively vulgar” or “obscene” materials, it is not clear that racism could be categorized as such.

In addition to the advocates for censorship, there are numerous groups opposed to it including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), People for the American Way (PAW), the Association of American Publishers (AAP), the American Library Association (ALA), the Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

One particular group, the NCTE, distinguished between having professional guidelines and censoring. An example would be censoring or removing a book with unhappy endings such as *Bridge to Terebithia*, by

¹ This figure does not reflect members belonging to more than one of the organizations.

² Although no clear definition was stated for obscene in this chart, it would be fair to assume it is defining traditional values.

Katherine Paterson, a 1977 Newbery Award winner, simply because of the outcome. The guideline would include books with unhappy endings as well as happy ones that present a varied view of life. (See Appendix A.)

Bridge To Terebithia is an approved novel for the middle school in my district. It is typically used in the seventh grade and coincides with a Skills for Adolescents course unit on death and dying. I have read and taught the book to a class I had in summer school. There are many reasons for teaching and to continue to maintain the book. It is a wonderfully written story about two young people who build a friendship in the eye of challenges, differences, and gender biases. The book creates a vehicle to explore real-life tragedies and address the issues of death and loss. Although there is an extremely sad conclusion, the plot and other interludes bring much to the story. The removal or elimination of the book from the curriculum would be disappointing, discouraging, and unjust.

Who determines what can be read and used in the classroom or in public institutions? What rights do citizens have for selecting books? Who can censor? That is where laws come into play.

LAWS ON CENSORSHIP

The laws on book banning vary from state to state and district to district. Most court cases come down to First Amendment rights and the right to receive information. "Most of the early case laws on such book banning do not deal with books at all, concentrating more generally on the authority of school officials to control the curriculum and the libraries as part of the process of inculcating and socializing students," stated Herbert Foerstel, researcher of book-banning and book-banning laws across the nation (65).

In addition, "There are twenty-three states that set guidelines for book selection at the school level," observed M.P. Dunleavy, a frequent writer on children's books for *Publisher's Weekly* (29). However, guidelines might include age appropriateness or making materials available by age or grade. Guidelines might also identify materials that might be considered explicit and/or harsh in language, or that deal with gender issues. Yet, setting guidelines to determine appropriateness, does not mean eliminating or banning a book.

The American Library Association has a Bill of Rights. Included in this document is a statement that "school libraries should provide material on opposing sides of controversial issues" (Burress, 1982, 12). When libraries make materials available that support both sides of an issue, an informed reader can arrive at a preference for a stand on an issue. If only one side were available, libraries would be censoring students' rights to receive information.

Consequently, many people feel that censoring is breaking the law of the United States Bill of Rights. Others feel that acts of censoring are merely a mockery of U.S. law. According to Lee Burress, "censorship is contrary to the practices of our democratic society" (12). He further stated, "the intent [of censoring] seems undemocratic since its purpose is to withhold information from the student" (12).

As of 1982, "a review of all cases involving the First Amendment rights of teachers and students would indicate that the majority of decisions uphold the students' right to read and to learn and the teacher's right to teach" (Burress, 1982, 32).³ Upon review of several state decisions, including *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico*, "the Supreme Court held, in a PLURALITY opinion, that it is unconstitutional for local public

³ Keep in mind that this fact may vary on any recent decisions.

school boards to ban books from school libraries merely because they dislike the ideas expressed in them" (*Guide to American Law*, 1984, 116).

The courts also have recognized that "local school boards have a significant role in deciding the content of school libraries; however, this does not empower them with unbridled discretion to ban any book" (*Guide to American Law*, 1984, 116).

INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

In addition to laws about censorship, there is something called intellectual freedom. While researching the idea, I discovered an extremely informative book called *The Students' Right to Know*. The authors presented a debate over the differences between intellectual freedom and academic freedom. According to Burress and Jenkinson,

Intellectual freedom is a general term that refers to the right of the inquiring mind to seek for information. Whereas academic freedom is a more limited term, referring to the intellectual freedom within the school, particularly to the right of teachers to teach and carry out research within the area of their assigned subject. Academic freedom is not a primary right; the primary right is the student's right to learn. (3)

Furthermore, it is the role of the school to be neutral. "In a diverse and multicultural society, public institutions must remain neutral without regard to doctrinal or partisan dispute" (Burress, 1982, 5). Equally important, school libraries should have a commitment to the truth and value all students. These sentiments echo the Bill of Rights of the ALA. Information regarding all religions and religious organizations should be available, as should, varying views of politics, including Communism, Marxism, and Democratism.

Moreover, censorship is a growing phenomenon, in light of intellectual freedom and the laws.

GROWTH OF CENSORSHIP AND CURRENT TRENDS

Of the vast amounts of materials I consumed about censorship, one theme rang constantly; this idea was presented by both censorship advocates and anti-censor activists. As pointed out by Susan Lehr, "Censorship does not achieve its goal! Surveys reveal that often censored books become bestsellers" (250). Susan Lang endorsed this sentiment as well; she stated that censoring "can increase the audience for a book" (30). This is suggested by the reception of the American classic *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. In 1884, the book was banned in Concord, Massachusetts; "it boosted sales to 50,000 copies in two months" (Lang, 1993, 30).

"Prior to the 1970s, most protesters were individual parents who became upset when they learned that their children's books contained language they considered offensive or ideas they decried" (Burrell, 1982, 19). Many writers have pointed to the decade of the 1980s as a key period when censoring began to boom. Children's author, Judy Blume, stated, "It wasn't until 1980, the big surge in censorship came" (West, 1988, 7).

"Books are being challenged across the country not because of the fabric of their being, but for anything that might in any way offend someone," (Hornbook, 1994, 132). The organization, People for the American Way, "bear witness that in 1991, California led the nation with thirty-six recorded censorship attempts to restrict books and curricula in public schools" (Strickland, 1991, 64). Article, after article stated that California and Texas were among the states that annually had the most censorship cases.

Mary Tabor, writer for the *New York Times*, commented, "Either books are becoming more despicable or parents more aggressive, because the list of contested books is growing" (D8). Censorship is on the rise. This sentiment is also voiced by Mary Tax, a teacher and author of four books, in *Parent's Magazine*. "There were more instances of school censorship in the 1993-1994 school year- a total of 375 than in any other year since 1982" (171). By the 1994-1995 school year, "the American Library Association said it received 760 challenges or censorship attempts, aimed at books or library materials, the highest count since 1981-1982, when the association fielded almost 1,000 challenges" (Tabor, 1995, D8).

Although it is true that censorship is on the rise, books are being judged not on literary merit, writing style, or the vision of the author, but on hearsay, exaggeration, and utter nonsense.

GOOD BOOK, BAD BOOK

"The movement that began about fifteen years ago to bring more racial diversity and gender equality into children's books may have been saluted by most writers and illustrators, but many of its strongest adherents now say that the pendulum has swung too far and that they are confronting a literary version of journalism's libel chill" (Harris, 1994, 46). Authors want to see and write about diverse topics and include multicultural themes. Yet, the notion of providing diverse materials has been overstepped. Yes, there are more materials and stories written on women's issues, gender equity, inter-racial relationships, single parent families, and same gendered relationships, than forty years ago. However, it is the censors who feel that too much of something is erroneous and could be promoting the subject. Therefore censors feel these

materials should be pulled from the shelves because the material is presented in a fashion that the censor does not support.

For example, if a book contained x number of objectionable and semi-profane words, it might be censored, based on the value of it as a whole but because of language. "Censors do not consider the value or meaning of the work as a whole; they make arbitrary decisions about the book based on some single aspect of the book" (Burrress, 1982, 13).

To further illustrate this point, a book might be censored and pulled from shelves because it contains portions relating to puberty and maturation. The reason for censorship might derive from a philosophy that supports development being taught at home, or in the church, but not in public places such as schools or libraries.

Thus books are being judged "as good or bad, because of tone or general theme, or overall effect" stated William Noble, researcher of banned books, (150). One such challenged book is by Maya Angelou. The first part of her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, has been objected to because of its realistic facts concerning rape and teenage pregnancy. The overall effect of the book on teenage readers has been seen as detrimental by the censors, and as such is being judged as a bad book.

No matter what the reason, highly acclaimed yet controversial children's author, Judy Blume, has frequently been subjected to censorship for these types of issues, as has Robert Cormier. Is there hope for authors for the future? Granted, there are many groups who are in favor of censorship.

ADVOCATES FOR CENSORSHIP

According to Erica Jong, a well-known author for the advocacy of women,

Margaret Mead pointed out 40 years ago, the demand for state censorship is usually a response to the presence within the society of heterogeneous groups of people with differing standards and aspirations.' As our culture becomes more diverse, we can expect more calls for censorship rather than fewer. (46)

This again recalls Harris's point that the pendulum has swung too far, the culture is diversifying; and hence more censorship issues are being raised. The more diverse a society the greater the likelihood objections will be raised by some group or individual.

As previously mentioned, there are a multitude of political action groups that support censorship. Whether the organization is religious, right or left wing, "what censors seem to have in common is the desire to protect children from influences they perceive as evil or harmful" (Lehr, 1995, 3). This protection from exposure has good intention; however, when censors fight for the removal of a book from the library or the classroom, or resort to book burning, "censors wish to make their actions permanent" (Burrell, 1982, 11).

In general, parental censoring groups are trying to maintain control over their children's lives and learning. Often parents feel that school literature "exposes kids to information that adults want to suppress," writes Charlene Strickland, a former youth services coordinator (63). She further states, "Parents are aiming to control kids' minds and bodies, they hesitate to empower kids" (63).

Susan Lehr also supported these sentiments:

Unfortunately, what often happens is that parents seek to control more than their own child's education. They go beyond asking that their child not be exposed to a particular book and demand the removal of a book from the classroom or library,

effectively denying all children access to the literature. (13)

Unfortunately, such individuals and organizations “are convinced that they know what is best for others to see and to read” (Noble, 1990,153). When this occurs, censorship occurs, and the Bill of Rights is violated. On the contrary, it would appear as though libraries assume the opposite stance.

LIBRARIES

“The library market alone yields 60-80% of the children’s book sales” (Adams, 1994, 74). As a public service, the American Library Association has developed and implemented a Library Bill of Rights. This Bill of Rights was adopted in 1980. The Bill states that libraries will endorse the “freedom to read,” (ALA, 1992, 53).

There are others duties and roles the library or librarian must provide. “Critical thinking-- it is a fundamental concept of librarianship and of providing information services; the librarian’s role is to advocate kids’ rights” (Strickland, 1991, 63). This supports the premise that schools, teachers, and parents, are attempting to prepare children to be independent thinkers, who are able to make informed decisions, including decisions about reading preferences and choices.

This view is well and good; however, there is a breakdown: “Librarians and teachers do quite a bit of self-censoring, seemingly to avoid controversy” (Lehr, 1995, 17). This makes logical sense. With tenure laws the way they are, with sue-happy parents and community members, it is no wonder that librarians and teachers would feel hesitant to teach and provide some reading materials. The lists of well-known and frequently targeted books have included some of the same titles over the last few decades. These have included *The Catcher in*

the Rye, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Of Mice and Men*, just to name a few American classics in literature.

"Librarians have always been the most incredible of censors," states Mr. J. Riggs, a librarian himself. "I engage in the highest form of censorship when I refuse to buy something, and I also refuse to borrow it if someone wants to read it" (Riggs, 1988, 81).

Librarians need to believe in the U.S., as well as, the Library Bill of Rights. Censorship should not occur. "Unfortunately, librarians reflect society, and a certain percentage themselves practice censorship" (Strickland, 1991, 64). Although it is true that some librarians are censoring, materials should be purchased with an open mind that presents many views on issues. Availability is key. The books need to be made available so that children may learn to make responsible choices in reading material. Students should be permitted to select reading materials with guidance based on their grade level and maturity.

It is important to keep in mind that "no one child is being forced to look at these books, but censors object to their mere presence in the library; they wish to deny their children the freedom even to see them and pass them by- and they would deny this freedom to our children too, though it is fundamental to democracy" (Tax, 1995, 171).

A third group of people who have the potential to be censors are teachers and those involved in public education.

TEACHERS AND THE CLASSROOM

"Teachers and librarians have a responsibility to provide books that they believe children are prepared to handle" (Lehr, 1995, 25). This must be determined individually based upon age appropriateness and maturity of each

particular class. Is this censorship itself? No, it is selection.

“The use of the book, the context in which it is read, the instructional goals for which the book was chosen- these have great influence on the reader’s response,” (Burrress, 1982, 35). For example, in my sixth grade class I **sometimes** teach Robert Peck’s historical novel, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*.

This book is frequently on the censored book lists. One reason that it appears is the title. Many people find it objectionable. Secondly, the book refers to “privates,” has references to God, and uses the word “damn.” In addition, the book is a coming of age story about a Shaker boy, in Pennsylvania during the 1940s, who must kill his pet pig in order for his family to survive the winter. He also must say the eulogy at his father’s funeral.

All of these would give a teacher reason to pause and consider teaching and using this novel. I must again repeat that I do not teach it every year. Why? I judge the maturity level of my students each year to determine which groups can adequately handle the discussion and confrontation of these materials. Often I teach the book to only one of my four sections. This is not censorship; it is selection based upon the present state of my students.

(One added note, this book has been approved for the sixth grade curriculum by the Language Arts Department, which got approval via our school board.)

I enjoy the book and feel that it teaches many great lessons. In the three years that I have taught this novel, I have had one parent write me a letter asking that her daughter be permitted to complete an alternate assignment. I had no problem providing this for her. I found it ironic though, that the student did not let her mother know of the book until there were only three chapters remaining. At that point, the language had been said, the birthing of a calf had

happened, and the boy had slaughtered his pig. I felt badly for the student who was left with a cliffhanger about the novel's conclusion. Hopefully one day, this student will go back to this novel as an adolescent or an adult and gain the true meaning of the book and enlighten her parents.

"As educators, we must be sure we're fulfilling our responsibilities to provide children with high-quality literature that challenges them to explore different ideas and perspectives" (Lehr, 1995, 25). This is a task I try to accomplish in all that I do. I provide a safe and comfortable classroom where students can express disbelief, disapproval, discomfort, joy, excitement, or pleasure in the literature we have just shared with one another. "Fiction must be judged according to its literary integrity, not by its moral 'rightness,'" stated Nicholas Karolides, a member of the Wisconsin Teachers of English (120). Censors must keep this in mind.

The fourth group that has the potential power to censor are the publishers and editors.

PUBLISHERS AND EDITORS

John Baker, Editor of *Publishers Weekly*, commented, "In the last twenty to twenty-five years, publishers have become far more timid about what is potentially libelous" (Noble, 1990, 166). He went on to say, "The chief thing that worries most publishers, is the threat of litigation. All publishers bear this in mind constantly" (166).

I find this to be quite similar to the librarians and teachers who are self-censoring. "Fear plays a part, bottom-line fear" (Noble, 1990, 164). No publisher wants the public eye on them, nor the monetary costs of a lengthy court battle. Their fear of lawsuits is great. "Publishers have become BIG

targets, fair game for libel and invasion-of-privacy hunters” (Noble, 1990, 165).

Although these changes in publishers’ attitudes may not directly relate to children’s literature, there are areas that do. Susan Lehr pointed out, “When publishers ask authors to gloss over controversial issues, tone down language, or delete certain references to sex and human anatomy, they justify the changes on the basis that ‘bookclubs would not like a scene,’ ‘it just doesn’t seem to work,’ or ‘it won’t sell’” (16). Again this has to do with control; by altering the author’s original written word, a form of censorship is occurring.

Sometimes though, a publisher can finagle their choices based on preferences. In other words, by saying that the work is poor, inadequate for the publishing firm, or not up to the publisher’s standards, the publisher has dodged the issue of censorship. “A bias in favor of good writing is standard and proper, and no one calls it book banning if the manuscript does not measure up” (Noble, 1990, 173). It is the publisher’s prerogative not to accept a manuscript and no one questions if the publisher has in effect censored the work.

One final group of potential censors that can be heard from around the nation are parents and parental organizations.

PARENTS

Some parents have the attitude, “I have power over my children. I can put blindfolds on them and plug up their ears so long as they are under my roof, I have complete control over them” (Noble, 1990, 151). This is a foolish point of view on the part of the parent. The child can go to the public library, a school bus, a neighbor’s house or a science museum, and pick up and browse through materials parents might not provide at home. It is obvious that some children will go to other places to find those exact materials that their parents object to.

Even if that means reading a book, such as a Judy Blume novel or Shel Silverstein one, in secret.

“It is probably healthier for a child and parent to confront controversial issues together rather than deny their existence” (Lehr, 1995, 25). If a child desperately wants to read a novel, what is the harm in letting him? There are few, if the adult directs the reading activity. The problem arises when the child is left to decipher and decode the text without meaningful discussion and follow-up.

“Parents have the right to have some say in the selection of materials for their own child” (Lehr, 1995, 25). Fundamentally, it is the child’s right to choose what to read. By giving children guidelines and choices about their reading selections, parents prepare them to make good choices as adolescents and adults. But to ban a book due to personal objection, and eliminate it for all, is ludicrous. Children have rights too.

CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO READ

“Reading remains one of the few activities that kids can pursue on their own” (Strickland, 1991, 63). It is their right and privilege to read freely. “An advocate trusts kids to sort through information and make their own decisions” (Strickland, 1991, 64). Again this comes with age, maturity, and acquired knowledge. Book selection takes skill.

“Once kids acquire independent reading skills, most parents bow out and kids assume more control over what they choose to read” (Strickland, 1991, 64). This is what growth and development is all about; it is not about control and censorship.

Whether an adult or a child is reading, “the reader decides during every

moment of the reading activity whether to continue reading, how to interpret what is read, and what action, if any, to take with regard to what is read” (Burruss, 1982, 34). It is the parents’, teachers’, and the community’s duty, to provide the child with skills and mechanisms to determine whether or not to pursue reading a particular work or to set it aside when the reader comes across something objectionable or puzzling.

Bearing this in mind, Susan Lehr stated, “Children should have access to whatever books they desire, in order to develop the understandings and skills needed to function in our society” (23). Shielding and attempting to protect our children through censoring and book banning does not teach our children how to read critically, or become a selective reader as an adult.

How are authors feeling about the recurrence of censorship?

THE AUTHORS’ VIEWS

According to Harris, “Authors resent what they regard as censorship of their work in pursuit of a bland, idealized, and unreal world” (46). I can sympathize and relate to this feeling; within many careers, including journalism, film, and theater, the individual who is writing or creating, must be inventive, dynamic, and not cave in to the feelings and the pressures of constraint and restrictions of the public merely to please a few individuals while hindering numerous others. “If you [authors] worry about what the neighbors, critics, parents, and supposedly pure-minded censors think, you will never create a work that defies the restrictions of the conscious mind and delves into the world of dreams” (Jong, 1995, 49).

Trust Your Children author Mark West brought up an interesting point. “Children’s authors whose works are being banned, generally hold different

beliefs about childhood that proponents for censorship do not" (xvi). This again returns to values, morals, religious convictions, and upbringing philosophies. The authors and the censoring public clearly do not share the same ideology.

Furthermore Jong stated, "In order to find the true voice of a book, the author must be free to play without fear of reprisals" (48). This is echoed by the editors and publishers as well. "Book banning pays no homage to what the writer has had to endure in order to produce his book" (Noble, 1990, 283). It harshly attacks the author's creative nature and the hurt clings to the author's heart and soul.

As a result, authors should be able to write children's fiction that is realistic, that is diverse in nature, and that does not infringe on their creative vision for the novel.

REALISM AND DIVERSITY IN LITERATURE

"Realistic fiction is about imaginary people, living in imagined contexts, doing what was never done, saying what was never said," stated Betsy Hearne and Marilyn Kaye, two children's literature advocates (35). Hearne further stated, "Realism, especially if it is felt to have a quality known as relevance, is of the greatest possible interest to teachers and librarians and every writer must have been made to feel so" (36). A similar definition by Charlotte Huck, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*: "Realistic fiction may be defined as imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today" (464).

Realistic fiction differs from fiction when the people truly could have lived, walked, and breathed in a particular time and setting. The events and activities that occur to them in the novel are legitimate and not fabricated in

order to “make” a good story. Realism brings out feelings and emotions within the reader that may make them question the validity of the characters’ positions within the novel. What is key to these definitions is that the events and people are fabricated first in the author’s mind and then in the reader’s mind.

“In the U.S.A., works of realism predominate in numbers and acclaim on the children’s lists” (Hearne, 1981, 36). “Books that honestly portray the realities of life may help children toward a fuller understanding of human problems and human relationships and, thus, toward a fuller understanding of themselves and their own potential” (Huck, 1987, 465). This is key to beginning the comprehension of past injustices and present prejudices.

Stereotypes of Black characters have been present since colonial literature. “The earliest settlers view him [the Black] as different and inferior” (Gross, 1966, 30). Blacks were represented with low status. For many decades, Blacks were not given significant roles within the plot of novels until 1852 when *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was written.⁴ In addition to being viewed as ignorant, savage-like, beastly, and barbarous, the Black was perceived to be spiritually inferior due to his/her lack of Christian values and lack of baptism. Writers have advanced a long way since these first writings about Black Americans; however these fallacies are still present in some American literature.

Broderick stated that, “We must label racism when and where it is found and try to influence the potential purchasers of the material and the publishers who produce it” (180). I disagree; as does Bobbi Swiderek, a veteran teacher of English, “Censorship grows out of fear to control children and shield them

⁴ This book was the first to place Blacks as main characters and to develop plots around them. Their lives were vividly revealed for the first time. During the first year of print, 300,000 copies were sold.

from the world" (592). When parents want to protect their children, sometimes the protecting can become overdone. Instead of monitoring and preferencing what their children are reading, these parents take over and control the child's reading materials. The child does not make choices and is not learning how to either. By hiding and concealing threatening information or literature about racism, sex, or any other sensitive issue, parents feel that they are protecting their child from the dangers of the world.

Books that are racist, or ones that conform to racial stereotypes, should remain on the shelves. Removal serves no purpose other than to appease the proponents of censorship. Lee Burress stated, "Organizations that are concerned with sexist or racist statements in books are offended when they are called censors- since they believe what they are doing is good for children" (21).

"The controversial books *ought* to be in the classroom under the guidance of a teacher, and where students can tell how they feel about the book or even refuse to read it" (Swiderek, 1996, 592). A few books that would work well to teach about racism and ethnic bias, specifically towards African Americans are *Maniac Magee*, by Jerry Spinelli, *Monkey Island*, by Paula Fox, *Beetles Lightly Toasted*, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *A Girl Called Boy*, by Belinda Hurmence, and *Far From Home*, by Ouida Sebestyen. Through education, guidance from home, schooling that includes teachers' support, librarians who allow controversial books to remain on the shelves, individuals reading these novels will be able to decipher fact from fiction in terms of the racial bias and stereotypes that are fabricated and hopefully will not continue to believe these idioms represented.

"Fiction, especially good fiction, can be counted on to be almost infinitely

various” (Karolides, 1985, 119). A lack of variety and books containing a common theme would deduct from the sense of creativity and inventiveness in what students read.

How can teachers, parents, librarians, and community members be more open to a variety of writings, views, and ideas-- by dispelling censorship.

DISPELLING CENSORSHIP

“To be ‘educated’ means to be allowed to think and wonder about ideas and their consequences; to be ‘indoctrinated’ means to hear only about acceptable values, beliefs, and traditions of a group” (Swiderek, 1996, 592). This is such a valid point. Whose values, whose beliefs, and whose traditions are acceptable? It is clear that censorship involves a select group attempting to control another; this occurs whether the controlling group is a majority or a minority faction. When a book is censored, it “denies ‘other’ people’s children access to that material” (Swiderek, 1996, 592). This denial infringes on others’ rights to acquire information and select their reading materials.

“Because our values and belief systems are formed at an early age, it is essential that children be exposed to good literature that celebrates diversity and helps to alleviate the intolerance, prejudice, and injustice suffered by many ethnic groups” commented children’s literature advocate and writer, Timothy Rasinski (161). By reading and writing literature that is flowery, pure, and mundane, an entire element of fiction is suffering and omitted.

Isolating language, images, and scenes misses a book’s whole effect and the author’s intent. No book should be judged and devalued solely because of a word, a phrase, a line, or a singular argument. That may be precisely its value. As Lehr pointed out, often advocates of censorship isolate

portions of novels without reading the book in its entirety (5). They object to a word or an image taken out of context, or that has a dictionary definition that can not be applied to the novel, the characters, or the author's vision for the book.

CONCLUSION

It was during the 1950s that "Dick and Jane" produced bland and stereotypical roles for white, blacks, males and females. "This very way of depicting only one side of reality was the only reality worth thinking about through the 1950s" (Lang, 1993, 76).

"Will we deny children books about the past, books about the ugliness, the humiliation, the cruelty, and the destruction of human dignity that existed during slavery days and during the days when the Ku Klux Klan rode openly and often? I hope not- for all children, black and white, deserve the truth" (Hornbook, 1974, 88).

"Teachers who work with parents and librarians in their community to bring books into the classroom may be able to respond individually to the needs of different children without imposing one set of materials on anyone" (Dunleavey, 1993, 29).

If a district feels it must adopt some guidelines, I suggest the one the Boston Public Library uses: "Field's Corner branch has no written policy; people are responsible for censoring themselves; parents should select materials for their kids; and, this way we can be more flexible" (Garden, 1994, 12).

I believe that all authors have a right to express themselves freely, to write about any topic they choose, to describe and develop plots, characters, and themes in any fashion that they see fit. For otherwise, "the end result could be children book's that portray a saccharine world where all is as it should be,

not as it is" (Harris, 1993, 47).

Children should have a wide spectrum of books from which to choose to read. I'm not referring to the various genres, such as, fantasy, mystery, biography, nonfiction, or fiction; what I mean is that books for children should allow the readers to experience a vast amount of diverse themes. Books should be vehicles for children to be able to explore, discover, and imagine the world of the characters in his or her own mind and let the story unfold.

PART TWO:

NEWBERY AWARD WINNERS

RACISM OR REALISTIC FICTION?

INTRODUCTION

“Race and ethnicity are culturally created and culturally altered,” explains Beth Rubin, sociologist and author (162). The idea of race has been socially constructed and one means to exemplify and even exaggerate these ideologies of the Black race, is in literature. Whether in adult novels or children’s works, race plays a significant role. Here I will evaluate literature for children.

“Historical novels for children help a child to experience the past; to enter into the conflicts, the suffering, the joys, and the despair of those who have lived before” (Huck, 1987, 532). I feel this is a powerful statement. Even though materials may be deemed by some to be ethnically or racially biased, support should be given for literature that presents characters and events true to life as it was in the past and is in the present. These sometimes flagrant stereotypes however, do not mean as a society we should censor books or pull them from library shelves.

The bottom line is that children of all ethnic backgrounds are subjected to the white dominant culture. Whether in a city school, a private academy, or a suburban public school, students are reading books that are primarily written by white female authors and about white society.

I will begin with a definition of the Newbery Award, then clarify the African idiom, discuss consideration points and audience, and finally examine the novels.

THE NEWBERY AWARD GUIDELINES

The John Newbery Award was established in 1922. The award itself is a gold medal and a certificate given to one author a year, in March, for a single book that has made “the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published in the United States the previous year” (A.L.S., 1993, 3). A further requirement states that the recipients also must be United States citizens or residents.

The award can be given to any genre of literature including poetry, non-fiction, and fiction. The criteria for the committee members to judge a work are based on the following:

Interpretation of the theme or concept; presentation of information, including accuracy, clarity, and organization, plot development, delineation of characters and setting, and appropriateness of style. (A.L.S., 1993, 4)

Also included in these criteria: “Committee members must consider excellence of presentation for a child audience” (A.L.S., 1993, 4). In addition to these features, the book’s illustrations and design should not be considered unless these factors “distract from the text.”

The award should first, “serve as an inspiration and guiding star to authors, artists, editors, and publishers alike,” writes Lee Kingman, editor of *Newbery and Caldecott Medal Medal Books*, for the past forty years. Secondly, and equally important, “We would hope that the award books reach out to hundreds of thousands of readers, and become a part of their lives” (Kingman, 1966, xvii).

Through an examination of Newbery Award winning novels written over

a period of ten years that include Blacks⁵ as main characters, I plan to determine who is reading the material, the significance of the inclusion of Black characters within the works, and how the novels have served to influence, develop, and support Eurocentric beliefs and values.

THE AFRICAN IDIOM AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In the United States where white individuals are the dominant group, whites often see themselves as "better than" other ethnic groups. When one group fails to develop an appreciation for the differences between ethnic groups this may lead to prejudice and repression of a particular group. As a result of whites feeling superior, standards of knowledge, beliefs, values, and rules for appropriate behavior have evolved. These rules are structured in the family, religion, education, government, and in the economy. The dominant part of society determines these norms and the limits of acceptable behavior. In addition to creating race, specifically a Black race, an African idiom, or stereotypical beliefs if you will, has been developed and has remained relatively unchanged for centuries within the United States. The African idiom includes several stereotypes about Blacks such as color-coding, physical traits, historical difference, savagery, and use of explosive and unintelligible language.⁶ There is an irony here. In early twentieth century literature, the

⁵ In researching Blacks in literature, I found a definite change in terminology from one century to the next. During the 1800s "Negro" was the primary terminology used. During the early twentieth century the terminology changed to "Black," and by the present day, "African-American" has become the most common. Although many people feel that African American is socially a more acceptable term to apply to the group of people that are of African descent, the term itself is misleading. There are many American Blacks that are from the Caribbean, South America, or even from Aboriginal descent. By qualifying these people as African American, an entire segment of the Black population is disregarded and omitted.

⁶ This type of stereotyping was referred to in Part One, page 17.

focus was on values such as truth, justice, honor, polite speech, and the like. According to Violet Harris, department of Elementary and Early Childhood, University of Illinois,

At the same time, the selective tradition included racial intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, and social inequity. Furthermore, the tradition suggests that Blacks were inferior, happy-go-lucky, and child-like. (192)

These stereotypes that are dictated by Eurocentrism are distorted, and suggest that *ALL* Blacks live in primitive conditions, lack the ability to learn, and that they use emotive and derogatory language when referring to cultures other than their own.

There are several individuals who have studied the presentation of ethnic characters in literature and they have made the following observations. Toni Morrison, renowned author of adult fiction and several nonfiction selections, pointed out that “for Black and white writers, in a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language” (13). Dorothy Broderick, a researcher of Blacks in children’s fiction, points out that “the situation is circular: the society dictates the content and attitudes within the books and the books serve to perpetuate societal attitudes from one generation to the next” (177). Thus Eurocentrism continues to present ethnic bias and stereotyping within literature. Seymour Gross in his study *Study of Blacks in Literature* suggested, “That perhaps the object of the stereotype is not so much to crush the Negro as to console the white man” (129). Hence, “Figurations of impenetrable whiteness surface in American literature whenever an Africanist presence is engaged” (Morrison, 1992, 32). This is further suggesting that whites feel superior and this is evident in some of their writings.

In order to evaluate children's works in terms of the presence of stereotyping and racial prejudices, there are several key points to be examined.

POINTS TO BE CONSIDERED

First, who is reading the material, how is it being used, and what is included in the content of children's books? Second, it is important to distinguish between historical, realistic elements and stereotypical ones. Third, "What does the inclusion of Blacks do to and for the work?" (Morrison, 1992, 16). Fourth, what themes, fears, and class relations are embedded in the African idiom in the novel? Finally, do the Black characters act out stereotypes? Or is the characterization based on realism? I will begin evaluating each book with a brief summary and then respond to the above questions.

I chose books written primarily for children and young adults. All of the stories I selected were Newbery Award winning novels from the 1970s and had a range in difficulty of reading from about grade four to grade ten. I am not questioning the validity of receiving the Newbery Award; my intent is to prove that these books adhere to racial stereotypes.

Who is reading this material? Obviously children from many diverse ethnic backgrounds are. However, I feel that a strong and powerful influence on what children read is based on what adults are reading to them. Many teachers, day-care employees, babysitters, grandparents, and parents read to children. In practice this is a sound means of encouraging and mirroring reading as a useful and valuable skill; however, at the same time, the types of books and materials that are being read may be detrimental.

How can reading to a child be a detriment? The actual reading aloud

and modeling is not hazardous. The words and the text itself could be; and the presentation of the themes and characters within a novel can be as well.

Children are very impressionable. Without getting into theories of intellectual or psychological development, children are like sponges that have the capacity to soak up knowledge to an unimagined and unmeasurable level. Children quench part of this thirst from written materials. When authors conform to the dominant culture and adhere to typical white values, they continue to emphasize, support, and further, racist and suppressive feelings in readers.

If the materials are presented honestly and in a realistic fashion children can learn much about injustices towards Blacks and the bias that has existed for centuries. "Books that honestly portray the realities of life may help children toward a fuller understanding of human problems and human relationships and, thus, toward a fuller understanding of themselves and their own potential" (Huck, 1987, 465).

The authors of these Newbery winners are equally accomplished and each has received a wide variety of awards for numerous stories. Part of their successes can be attributed to educators. Teachers and librarians are selecting and reading these works with students. This is especially true when a book is named an award winner, even more so for a Newbery winner. Librarians, teachers, and purchasers tend to gravitate to those titles. Often there is a shelf of these materials separate from the rest of the books in libraries, further indicating their significance and value.

It is typical for most individuals who enjoy a work by a particular author, to select another book by that person to read at a later time. In addition, younger children gravitate to repetitiveness and ideas that are familiar; as a result, they often read books more than once until the point of being able to recite lines

verbatim. The problem lies herein: racial and ethnic stereotypes may be repeatedly read and emphasized for youngsters to absorb while reading.

One final group of people who read these works I prefer to clump together: the editors, publishers, reviewers, and award judges. Like children who find one book by an author particularly good, interesting, and appealing, adults have a similar response. The more novels written, the more books read, the more frequently they are reviewed, the more often the author receives an award for his or her work.

I have read other books by these authors that did not have Black characters. However, these Newbery winning novels did include Blacks that on first glance exhibited ethnic stereotypes. However, I am not suggesting that publishers, reviewers, and editors are intentionally enforcing racism; nor am I implying that the authors are writing with the intention of doing so either.

There is a distinct difference between the types of novels that receive the Newbery Award. Next, a more clear definition for types of fictions will be addressed.

REALISTIC AND HISTORIC FICTION

"In the U.S.A., works of realism predominate in numbers and acclaim on the children's lists" (Hearne, 1981, 36). Each of the books reviewed is a fictional novel; however, three of the five novels are historical fiction. "Realistic fiction is about imaginary people, living in imagined contexts, doing what was never done, saying what was never said" (Hearne, 1981, 35). Hearne further stated, "Realism, especially if it is felt to have a quality known as relevance, is of the greatest possible interest to teachers and librarians and every writer must have been made to feel so" (36). A similar definition by Huck stated, "Realistic

fiction may be defined as imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today" (464). What is key to these definitions is that the events and people are fabricated first in the author's mind and then in the reader's mind.

"Historical fiction, on the other hand, thrives on subjectivity; it is an interpretation, acted out in a most subjective way, by individuals confronting historical realities," said editor Janet Hickman in *Study of Children's Literature; How it Works in the Classroom* (136). In addition to presenting a story, the authors must pull the reader in to a different era. Sometimes this may difficult to do without boring the young reader with detailed backgrounds and introductions. Therefore, "historical fiction should be judged on its literary merit" (Hickman, 1989 144). It may not always be judged on exhaustive historical accuracy.

Hickman further stated, "Historical fiction creates a powerful sense of history in which students explore the joy, conflicts and sufferings of those who have lived before us" (144). Keeping this in mind, adherence to racial and ethnic stereotypes, on the part of the author, sometimes occurs and the youthful readers are none the wiser.

At first glance, the novel *Sounder* appears to be loaded with such biases.

***Sounder* : 1969**

"This is a stark tale of a black sharecropper and his family who endure cruel injustice with dignity and courage" (Huck, 1987, 559). "Most of those who welcomed *Sounder* in 1969 and created the context in which it won the Newbery, responded to its links with classical literature and the Greek ideal. These were usually alluded to by such expressions an 'epic quality,' 'dignity,'

and 'stark inevitability of Greek tragedy,'" said Nancy Huse, Professor of English (66).

According to sociologist Donna Rae MacCann, one of the greatest criticisms of this novel is that the only character in the book with a name is the coon hound, Sounder. All of the other characters are referred to as Mother, Father, the boy, and his three siblings. The oldest son, who is about age thirteen, has ambitions. Some of these are for himself, while others are for his family. The primary one is that, "he wished his mother or father could read" (18).

The family leads a very lonely life, isolated from both the Black and white community, and does not interact with others until three white men come to the house one evening. The first man, the sheriff whose name is also not given, followed by two police officers, accuses the father of stealing a ham. When the deputies attempt to take the father away, the sheriff orders, "Stick out your hands, boy" (21). The son, not recognizing the racial term, put his hands out obediently, not realizing the officer wanted his father. When the police were putting the father into the wagon, the sheriff yelled, "Chain him up" (24). Again, the boy misconstrues the situation and begins to hook Sounder up to a leash, not comprehending that the men intend to secure his father.

As the wagon with the three policemen and the father is pulling away, Sounder breaks loose from the boy's grip and chases after the father. One of the deputies fires and shoots at Sounder. He is injured, and later the boy finds Sounder's ear in the middle of the road. He keeps it under his pillow, hoping for the safe return of his dog.

The dog does not return immediately, and Mother begins to tell some stories about dogs healing themselves by lying on oak leaves and about dogs that go away to die alone. The portion about animals dying by themselves

appears realistic. But the story she tells about the dog curing and mending his wounds is almost unbelievable and even supernatural.

The father has been imprisoned for some time now. The son goes to take a cake to the jail since it is nearing Christmas time. The boy is meek and timid when approaching the town. The welcome he receives at the jailhouse prove his feelings to be legitimate.

“You’ll have to wait. It ain’t visitin’ hours yet. Who do you want to see? You’ll have to wait.” And he slammed the door before the boy could speak. (58)

Later, when the man finally did return,

The man with the red face squeezed the cake in his hands and broke it into four pieces. “This could have a steel saw or hacksaw blade in it.” Then he swore and threw the pieces back in the box. The boy was afraid. (59)

This scene is further indicative of the rest of the story where the boy and his mother are repeatedly treated in an uncivilized and threatening fashion. The other characters in the story show no respect, compassion, or human decency towards the family at all.

For days at a time the boy would venture out and try to find where his father is working on a chain gang. However this is to no avail. At various work sites he is tormented by the overseer. At one site the boy is merely resting his hands on an iron fence and is peering into the field to see if any of the working men are his father. Then,

Suddenly something crashed against the fence in front of the boy’s face. A jagged piece of iron tore open the skin and crushed his fingers of one of his hands against the fence. “That’ll show you, boy! Git! And git fast!” (89)

It may be difficult to imagine that the boy is assaulted for looking over a fence.

There is one man who is different, though. This man is a school teacher. The boy is a good day and night's walk from home when he comes upon a school house while searching for his father. The boy retrieves a discarded book with a missing cover from the trash barrel. When the teacher sees the boy, he makes small talk. The boy says that he wants to wash his hand. The conversation develops, and when the boy explains that he is far from home the teacher offers to take him home to wash and clean the boy's sore.

This being done, the teacher feeds the boy and allows him to stay overnight. The boy expresses his own desires to learn to read and the teacher makes him a proposition. When the boy returns home, he tells his mother what has occurred. He will be visiting the teacher during the school year and returning home for holidays and "in the summer he took his father's place in the fields, for the cabin rent to be paid with field work" (102).

One spring Sounder strolls up the road, healed. Many years later the father also returns, but he is not healed:

The head of the man was pulled to the side where a limp arm dangled and where the foot pointed outward as it was dragged through the dust. What had been a shoulder was now pushed up and back to make a one-sided hump so high that the leaning head seemed to rest on it. The mouth was askew too, and the voice came out of the farthest wrinkled, lifeless, side. (107)

He has served his time for allegedly stealing a ham; although the book never clearly proves or disproves that he has done so. Less than half of a man returns where a full man had left. Shortly thereafter, the man and Sounder go to hunt one last coon. Sounder returns home and the man does not. The boy searches for his father and finds him dead in the woods. Two weeks later, Sounder crawls under the house to die.

man without a trial, today, would be unjust and unacceptable for all ethnic groups.

In present times, it would seem that the unnamed characters of *Souder* would react to the mistreatment directed towards themselves. This does not happen. As a result of the lack of resistance to the white character's mistreatment, "some people have criticized the story particularly for the lack of militancy on the part of the black characters," commented Jane Langton in her editorial (88).

"Left out of *Souder* are the very things which need to be said in the face of the oppression the book depicts" (Huse, 1987, 67). Not one individual reacts to the behaviors and injustices that have occurred to this family. Because of its prejudice and racism the boy may not be permitted him to attend the public school where he resides. Even the teacher who does reach out to the boy and allows him to attend school, does not seek any justice for the actions that have been directed to the boy's family.

Overall, this book is realistic with the stereotypical attitudes and behaviors represented about Blacks within the white characters.

The second novel is also historical fiction.

***The Slave Dancer* : 1974**

"*The Slave Dancer* is a savage indictment of a whole society, intensely political in its overtones which ring down through the ages to the present day," commented critic, Mollie Hunter (122). This is a historical novel occurring in the 1840's, about a thirteen-year-old white street musician named Jessie Bollier. He has been kidnapped and confronted with numerous "tests" on board a slave ship. The *Moonlight's* crew and captain are not portrayed as the villains except

in Jessie's (the protagonist's) eyes; to the reader the slaves in captivity are the antagonists and villains. "It's an astonishing achievement that Paula Fox can use such terrifying, such adult, material as the slave trade and turn out a children's book that is something like perfection" (Hunter, 1975, 123).

The story itself advances numerous chapters prior to Jessie discovering his actual purpose. He learns that he is kidnapped in order to play and perform for the slaves so that they might dance to keep their muscles and bodies firm and in shape for sale in the States.

Jessie's true agonies do not occur until the return voyage from Africa. Even though the crew has whipped, beaten, and nearly starved Jessie, these trials are nothing in comparison to what is done to the still living slaves who are casually tossed overboard because of sickness.

There are a few references made to the slaves as Blacks and "niggers" but until the slaves are aboard ship, Jesse cannot imagine the magnitude of oppression and indecency directed to these people.

As for the stereotypes that the novel portrays, there are many. First, Jessie asks,

"Why was that man treated that way?"

"What man?"

"The one who was forced to drink the rum?"

"Man?"

"That Purvis was flinging about so..."

"You mean that nigger!"

"Him," I said.

These statements clearly provide an example where the slave is not even considered to be a man let alone treated humanely. This is further exemplified when by "Benjamin Stout who, moving across the recumbent bodies in the

holds, went about his work as though stepping on cobblestones,” (59). Second, is in regards to the claim that Blacks are happy souls. In this story once the slaves are fed a crew member responds, “When they see we intend on feeding them, they grow quite cheerful” (63). Cheerful, these people are captives! How could they be cheerful? Third, the novel follows the theme that Blacks aren’t capable of any thought.

“I wondered where they think they are,” I muttered.

“They don’t think much,” responded Sharkey.

“You can be sure they’re glad to be alive! Ain’t we all glad?” (92).

The selfish reason of greed is why the crew is glad to have the slaves alive, so the crew may profit upon reaching the States.

Albert Schwartz, in *Interracial Books for Children*, said, “ The Black people are only pathetic sufferers. No ‘fight back’ qualities whatever are found in these characterless, chained objects on the ship” (7).

In contrast, Julius Lester, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, took a slightly different approach in his attack. He stated, “With such good writing, it is too bad that the book as a whole does not succeed. This novel describes the horrors of The Middle Passage, but it does not recreate them, and if history is to become reality, the reader must live that history as if it were his own life.”

Huck contradicts Lester’s view. “A history textbook tells; a quality piece of imaginative writing has the power to make the reader feel, to transport him to the deck of a slaveship and force him into the hold until he chokes on the very horror of it” (143).

At the time of publication, one can see by the commentary about the novel, that controversy surrounded it, At Fox’s Newbery acceptance speech

there were demonstrators. After giving her speech, “one or two of the previously hostile critics approached me, to let me know I was forgiven” (Kingman, 1976, 89).

“Fox meticulously researched every facet of the slave trade and of the period” (Garrett, Vol.2, 100). Even so, Binnie Tate points out in *Inter-racial Books For Children*, “No matter what the author’s intent, it presents grave problems for those of us concerned with eliminating children’s materials which help perpetuate racism” (38). Although features of this book are historically accurate, the major character roles are by the white crew and the kidnapped boy. Any emergence of the “cargo, ninety-eight slaves whose true names were remembered only by their families” (6), are minor roles within the plot itself.

The idea of kidnapping Jesse came from a footnote Fox had once read that said, “that slaver crews often kidnapped youth street musicians and signed them on ships as slave dancers” (Kingman, 1976, 21). These types of accurate portrayals of the slave trade help in developing the realism of the novel.

Would it even have been necessary to kidnap Jesse if the slaves were not shackled so tightly like sardines on board the *Moonlight*? No. If the slaves were permitted to be men and move freely, there would be no need for Jesse to perform so that they could dance. There is an irony in “moving freely,” it is that these men aren’t free nor does the novel suggest that they ever will be, and the capturing of them takes away their manhood, pride, and dignity.

Overall, considering both sides of the critics, and reading the novel, I believe that Fox’s book is a work of historical realism and is not ethnically or racially biased for modern times.

The third book in the study is realistic fiction.

***M.C. Higgins, The Great* : 1975**

This story follows a few days within the lives of the Higgins family. The family lives in the mountains of Southern Ohio. Nearby is the Ohio River. The family owns six acres called Sarah's Mountain; it was named after Mayo Cornelius's, great-grandmother who legally purchased the land when it was tillable. She is buried in the hillside and willed the property to the family. This flat parcel on the mountain is the only thing the family owns other than the small disheveled home in which they live. They are poor and do not own a car or have a phone.

The oldest child, Mayo Cornelius Higgins, who is referred to by the name M.C., is one of four other children. Banina, the mother, leaves the home at dawn to work in the city at other people's home doing cleaning and cooking. Jones, the father, also must venture down the mountain every day in hopes that the steel mill will have work for him.

The characters are briefly physically described when the reader first meets them and no other references are made once race has been established. "Virginia Hamilton's portraits serve to show the richness of character and the multidimensional aspects of African Americans" (Rudman, 1995, 23). "M.C. was tall, with oak-brown skin, like his mother; yet he was muscular and athletic, like his father" (4). This let the reader know that the Higgins family was Black.

The reader learns of the Killburns, neighbors who also live on the mountain. The Higgins family thinks that they are witches and that the children should stay away from them. The Killburns have a boy, Ben, who is close to M.C. in age. Once Ben is described the reader gains a better understanding for why Jones does not want his children playing with him. He is white.

Ben's unsmiling face was pale yellow and always looked

slightly peaked. He had shocking red hair, thick, and long. (9)

The story starts with a flashback of Jones finding M.C. on the riverbank after nearly being drowned in the river. Jones's reaction is to beat the child so that he will learn to swim and not take chances like this again. Once M.C. does learn to swim, his father gives him a forty foot steel pole.

On his pole, he is Mayo Cornelius Higgins, the Great, observer of everything moving on Sarah's Mountain: the strip-mining machines at the top; the growing heap of spoil which could slide and crush his house; the changing weather; his great-grandmother Sarah's ghost; and the Dude to record Banina's voice.

(Kingman, 1976, 126)

The pole gives M.C. power; however, being able to climb it and sit at the top takes skill. He is quite the acrobat climbing the pole. The father and M.C. are at odds with each other even through the end when M.C. considers stabbing his father if his father will not allow him to choose his friends and play with Ben.

The story includes folklore, mystery, and imagination. The Higgins family believes that Grandma Sarah's voice can be heard calling from the hills and believe that her ghost lives there.

A visitor who has the name James K. Lewis is called the Dude throughout the story.

M.C. studied his face. It was the color of barn-dried walnuts with deep creases, which M.C. guessed were lines of worry and maybe sometimes laughter. (34)

He is first introduced struggling up the mountain in order to make a tape recording of Banina singing. M.C. does not have food to offer the man but can only fill his canteen with water. The man is disappointed to learn that Banina is at work and will not arrive home until dark. When he returns and is asked into the home, the family's lack of wealth shows even more. References are made

that the couch came from someone although no one can remember now from whom. The children don't have milk to drink with their supper because there isn't enough money to buy any.

What makes matters worse is that the property is no longer arable. The sludge and "spoil" from the strip-mine are creeping closer and closer to the home and eventually will take the home, the trees, and all else with it in its path down the slope. Jones is in denial of these facts and refuses to leave voluntarily. He takes pride in what he does own although there is no value in it. The only hope of moving is in Banina's music.

After the Dude records Banina singing, he returns some days later to apologize for not be able to "push" her tapes to a distributor. The hopes of M.C. leaving Sarah's mountain have dwindled. The Dude again raises issues about health and safety of the spoil that is moving in half inch increments nearer to the house. This angers M.C. and he proceeds to construct a wall to protect that family from the seeping and shifting spoil. Jones sees this as futile at first and argues with M.C. Eventually Jones comes around and presents M.C. with a stone to be placed in the wall. The stone is Granny's tombstone. It is placed in the wall and all of the children begin to help construct it until it gets taller and wider.

This story, in my opinion, has some realistic aspects but the 'supernatural' and mysterious qualities make this novel seem close to unreal and even fantasy-like. Climbing and sitting upon a forty foot pole, the mysterious girl who arrives on the mountain, and M.C. gaining what appears to be inner strength, are examples that help to formulate questions, concerns, and unbelieving thoughts, in the reader's mind. It seems as though some events could not likely happen, and are too coincidental, furthering the idea of

romanticism.

Since the main characters are Black the inclusion of them is pertinent to the story. The stereotypes in this story are not hidden and are quite obvious. Tim Rasinski and Cindy Gillespie wrote in the *Annotated Guide to Children's Literature: K-6*, "The book provides the reader with a vivid and unforgettable description of the many hardships that Black families in the South had to face" (187). The father does not have a dependable job; the mother must work outside the home in someone else's; the oldest son is taking care of and looking after the younger children; the father and son have a poor and sometimes volatile relationship; the father's lines on his face show that he knows he will be a failure and cannot sell. This is a stereotype indicative of Blacks who cannot possibly be successful.

In addition, M.C. is categorized as an athlete and someone of strength, which is exhibited in his ability to climb a steel pole. This also represents in some ways animate qualities further providing the reader with the perspective of a Black who has non-human qualities. "Here you are inside this boy, can he read and write? It doesn't matter. Poverty has purified his life of dross, reducing it to elemental things" (Langton, 1974, 671). In addition to the people, the home is broken down. Because the family is poor they are clinging to property which is uninhabitable to wealthier white people. "As of this writing, the story is too large and still too close to be seen whole; the perspective of time is needed to discern its shape and its standing" (Kingman, 1976, 152). At the present time it may very well still be too close.

In contrast, Francella Butler, speaker/presenter at the Modern Languages seminar of Children's Literature said, "The beauty of the writing, the poetic imagery, the characters, each unique yet completely believable, and the

original themes all make the reading of this book an unforgettable experience, and mark Virginia Hamilton as one of the most important of today's writers for children" (195). Further comments came from Huck, "Again Virginia Hamilton has created a symbol filled book that speaks to both the black experience and the universal concerns of all human beings" (505). Hamilton herself stated, "Echoes of long past times serve to feed my imagination" (Hearne, 1981, 58).

The fourth book in the study, is the last historical fiction one.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry : 1976

"Mildred Taylor comes closer than anyone else to giving us a really good novel about racial prejudice," responded David Rees author of *Marble in the Water* (108). This tale profiles the life of a Black family that lives in the farmlands of Mississippi. The Logan family consists of Mama and Papa, three children, and Big Ma, the grandmother. "It is both a bitter indictment of the prejudice and persecution of Blacks in the rural South and a testament to their pride and resilience" (Kingman, 1986, 156). The family is one of the few Black families that owns their own land and is not sharecropping. Of the 400 acres, 200 is on a mortgage. Papa has left the house in order to find work on the railroad to bring money back to the family. Mama is a teacher for Great Faith School, the segregated school for the Blacks.

Cassie Logan, the daughter, is nine years old. The story is told from her point of view. She experiences racism at a very early age beginning with having to walk to her segregated school while the white children ride on a school bus. During the fall rainy weather the bus driver makes every attempt to splash the Black children who are walking. "As moronic rolls of laughter and cries, 'Nigger! Nigger! Mud eater!' wafted from open windows, Little Man threw

his mudball, missing the wheels by several feet" (48).

In Strawberry, the nearby town, Cassie realizes that all of the white customers are being waited on before she is. Her family has been waiting and even white children take precedence over Mrs. Logan. As Cassie is leaving, she accidentally bumps Lillian Jean, a white girl who in particular harasses Cassie. Cassie apologizes, however Lillian insists that Cassie should walk in the street. "You can't watch where you going, get in the road. Maybe that way you won't be bumping into decent white folks with your little nasty self" (114). An argument ensues until Lillian's father arrives to force another apology from Cassie, this time making her refer to Lillian as *Miz* Lillian Jean. These are a few of several events that outrage and confuse Cassie in regards to racial bias and mistreatment.

T.J. Avery is one of the sharecropper's children. He creates many difficulties for Stacey Logan, the oldest son, and for Mrs. Logan. Later in the story he breaks into the Wallace store with two white boys who have set him up. T.J. struggles with the owner; one of the white boys hits the owner with an axe and he eventually dies. "A crescendo of ugly hate rose from the men" (254). The white boys claim innocence and point their fingers at T.J. Then T.J. is taken to jail for a murder he does not commit.

Throughout the book, the store owner, Mr. Wallace, and the wealthy land owner, Harlan Granger, are in cahoots to cheat the Blacks. Granger threatens to call the mortgage in on the Logans when he realizes it is they who have been talking to the sharecroppers about getting credit at a store in Strawberry.

The one man who sticks up and fights for the Logans and the sharecroppers' rights is a white lawyer named Mr. Jamison. He too can only do so much like signing for credit at the store in Strawberry for the other Blacks

because Mr. Granger is monopolizing all the cash his tenants should be receiving.

At the close of the story when Mr. Logan fears for the lynching of T.J., he intentionally sets his field of cotton afire. This field backs the Granger's woods and property so Granger has a vested interest in saving the land. At this point all of the men leave the Avery home and come to the field to help prevent the fire from spreading to the Grangers. No man looks at one another but they are fighting side by side for the same cause. In the end, the Logans lose a quarter of their crop to prevent the lynching of one valuable Black boy. "The full weight of racist violence falls on the hapless lad, T.J. Avery, and here the author does perhaps make concession to the fact that she is writing a children's book rather than a novel for adults" (Rees, 1980, 111). As opposed to lynching T.J., Taylor lessens the severity of his punishment and has the whites imprison him.

This story is quite accurate historically. Again, the characters are crucial to the story in order for there to be one. The stereotypes of Blacks are not represented in the book. "Cassie's family, more than most Blacks in the area, are marked out for victimization. They aren't poverty-stricken illiterate cotton-pickers; they are intelligent, educated people, owners of four hundred acres of land" (Rees, 1980, 110). The family is a cohesive unit. The characters also do not reflect body typing or specific physical traits either. They reach out to others and to the Black community.

On the whole, the characters that do exemplify stereotypes of racism are the whites, who continually harass, mistreat and interfere in the Blacks' lives. The mistreatment of Blacks by whites is rampant throughout the story. T.J. is jailed for a crime he did not commit and no one is able to defend him. Cassie has to show respect to a white child by addressing her as *Miz*. "The trenchant

picture of bias in Taylor's book is devastating and believable" (Kingman, 1986, 156).

The final review is realistic fiction.

The Great Gilly Hopkins : 1978

This is the runner-up award winner for 1979. It received a Newbery Honor Medal, but not the actual award.⁷ This particular story is about the foster care system, and as such, the majority of support for the book is in regards to its excellence in addressing the issue of foster care. The sources that felt the book exemplified a wonderful story of a foster child, did not address issues concerning race.

Galadriel Hopkins, also known as Gilly, is a very bitter, frustrated, angry, foster child. Her social worker, Miss Ellis, is nearly at her wits ends after Gilly has been to three different foster homes within the last three years. At the start of the story Miss Ellis and Gilly are on their way to the her next home.

When they pull up to the sidewalk the house looks dingy. A large woman comes to the door and meekly hidden behind her enormous hip is a young child named William Ernest. Gilly does everything in her power to aggravate and disturb Mrs. Trotter. Trotter has had many foster children and does not even blink an eye at Gilly who is cunningly trying to get her attention. Instead Gilly directs her attention to W.E. and begins to torment him.

Trotter asks Gilly to go next door and get the neighbor to bring him over for dinner. Gilly reluctantly finds the house and knocks on the door.

Suddenly the door swung inward, revealing a tiny shrunken man. Strange whitish eyes stared out of a wrinkled, brown

⁷ I included this book due to the decade it was written in and because coming in as runner-up, the book obviously was in contention for the award and upheld all of the standards.

face. (11)

Gilly slams the door and rushes back to Trotter's. Trotter questions Gilly on where Mr. Randolph is. Gilly responds,

"I don't know. He's gone. He's not there."

"What d'you mean he's not there?"

"He's gone. Some weird little colored man with white eyes came to the door."

"Gilly! That was Mr. Randolph. He can't see a thing. You've got to go back and bring him by the hand, so he won't fall."

Gilly backed away. "I never touched one of those people in my life." (11)

This scene is typical of Gilly's behavior towards Blacks.

Gilly must register for school and the next morning Trotter takes her in.

The principal walks Gilly and Trotter to her new class.

Mr. Evans knocked, and a tall tea-colored woman, crowned with a bush of black hair, opened the door. She smiled on the three of them, because she was even taller than the principal. (20)

Once Gilly discovers her new sixth grade teacher, Miss Harris is Black she reacts in her usual fashion,

Gilly shrank back, bumping into Trotter's huge breast, which made her jump forward again quickly. God, on top of everything, the teacher was black. (21)

Gilly's living arrangements improve at Trotters, and she eventually enjoys and wants to live there with them. However, before these thoughts come about Gilly creates an elaborate scheme to steal from Mr. Randolph. She begins to clean the filth in Trotter's house and then she advances to Mr. Randolph's. She finds forty-four dollars and plans to use the money to buy a bus ticket to go to California to stay with her mother. Her plan is foiled by the ticket agent who alerts the police to her, and they safely return her to Trotter.

The story ends with Gilly's grandmother seeking her out and calling Miss Ellis to arrange to have Gilly placed in her custody. This does eventually happen and Gilly leaves Trotter, W.E., and Mr. Randolph.

When Gilly leaves she apologizes to Mr. Randolph for stealing his money. She wishes for a day's notice to say goodbye to Miss Harris, but Gilly does not get that opportunity. She is saddened to leave the "old hippopotamus" and the "little nerd boy" and does so unwillingly and mirrors the scene of her arrival at the Trotter house at the beginning of the story.

This book does make advancement as far as Blacks are concerned. Miss Harris is a good teacher who strives for excellence from her students. Even when Gilly sends her a racist card as a joke, Miss Harris responds in a kind manner to let Gilly know her feelings about receiving such an anonymous note. Mr. Randolph is cared for by his neighbors and the community looks out for him. These two people are both intelligent, sensitive, and do not follow behavioral stereotypes.

I personally believe that Gilly's actions are prejudiced and biased. Even for a young child, Gilly displays several overt acts directed towards Mr. Randolph and Miss Harris. This being said, I feel that Paterson does not go far enough in having Gilly recognize that her behaviors were unjust and racist. It is possible that Gilly sending a response letter to Miss Harris after she has moved in with her grandmother is in some form an admission of her biases. However, if Gilly could have hugged Mr. Randolph goodbye, it would have displayed that Gilly changed her attitudes and could get personal with Blacks.⁸

CONCLUSION

⁸ To the young reader, this may not be seen as an admission of wrongful prejudice.

This research merely examines one small element of the field of children's literature. These authors do not represent all children's authors, nor are they representative of all the types of novels available to children and young adults.

I do not feel that I was able to prove what I intended to. Although there are stereotypes present within children's literature, I believe that the novels of the 1970 Newbery Award winners overall did not conform to the African idiom and ethnic stereotypes. I do feel that the majority of the material was historically accurate and reflects realism found in fiction.

All people that are reading children's books also need to change their views on the African idiom. Teachers, parents, and others reading to children need to make better choices on what they are selecting to read to children and become more accountable.

"If teachers are to develop the skills to select the reading materials available for use in a multi-cultural situation, they not only need to be aware of their own prejudices, but also need to acquire the skills to identify those books which are racially and culturally biased, and therefore unsuitable for use" (Verma, 1984, 168). This task will prove a challenge and difficult.

"Race has become metaphorical- a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was" (Morrison, 1992, 63). By focusing directly on what children learn and assimilate through reading, it is necessary, imperative, and pertinent to change the description of the black character starting in children's literature. For, "a well-written book makes the reader aware of the human suffering resulting from inhumane acts by others" (Huck, 1987, 466). This awareness helps to create

and develop compassion, sympathy, and comprehension of how groups, other than whites, are and have been treated and portrayed.

PART THREE:

AUTHORSHIP, THEN AND NOW, READERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Although *Sounder*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Hear My Cry*, *The Slave Dancer*, *M.C. Higgins ,the Great*, and *The Great Gilly Hopkins* were Newbery Award winning novels, there has been, and will continue to be, controversy and commentary around these novels. First of all, the notoriety of the award automatically brings discussion to these books. Secondly, most of the authors have achieved acclaim within the field of children's literature and therefore the works are referred to and cited often.

In order to be objective, I read and studied the novels discussed in Part II. prior to examining what "others" had said about the books. Let's see what others have said and are saying about these novels near time of publication and today.

I have also included short biographical sketches on the authors so that you may be familiar with the background, lifestyles, and perspectives from which these authors have been writing. I will begin with the eldest author of the study.

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG: *SOUNDER*

The author of *Sounder* is the only male author from this study. His biographical information was more limited compared to the other authors. In

one source, his statements about his own life were brief and not very personal.

Armstrong was born in Lexington, Virginia on September 14, 1914. His schooling began early and he attended Augusta Military Academy in order to better prepare for college. He was a *cum laude* student at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. From there he went directly to the University of Virginia. "After college I began teaching thirteen and fourteen year-olds and have spent my life with them" (De Montreville, 1972, 20). Armstrong has long since retired (1976) from teaching at the Kent School for Boys in Connecticut.

Armstrong was married for ten years until his wife died. He never remarried. They had three children who "were forced to help with household chores, often having to be alone" (De Montreville, 1972, 20).

Some of his other works include: *Sour Land*, *The MacLeod Place*, *The Mills of Gold*, *My Animals*, and *The Education of Abraham Lincoln*. He also wrote many publications geared for adults before beginning to write for children. As for his awards, in 1963 Armstrong received the National Association of School Administrators National School Bell Award and his 1970 Newbery Medal.

Sounder was a book that I had not read as a child, nor as a teacher. I instruct a thematic unit on Newbery winning novels, so I am familiar with title and have come across the book many times. Since there are seventy-five Newbery books in the collection, I merely had never selected *Sounder* for use. It wasn't until last year that I read it for the first time. This may seem insignificant. Yet upon further research, I discovered, of the tens of thousands of children's books written, *Sounder* was the only Newbery Award winning book on a list of novels with the most copies sold.⁹ According to Burke and Payne, 1,815,401

⁹ The list compiled book titles for both adult and children's materials, from 1895-1975, that had sold a minimum of one million copies.

copies of *Sounder* had been sold as of 1975 (47). This success could possibly be attributed to the creation of a movie loosely based upon the book.

Shortly after the book had claimed fame, John Townsend felt, "some of the charges made against *Sounder* seem obviously misguided" (275). For example, one of the major criticisms concerning the characters of the book is that the only character with a name is the dog, Sounder. "It must have been the author's intention that the characters should appear universal, not tied down to local habitation and a name" (Townsend, 1974, 275). In the mid 80s Kimmel and Segel, literature enthusiasts and co-authors of *For Reading Out Loud*, reiterated this point. "Some critics have felt that Armstrong's decision not to give the characters names demeans them, but children recognize the love and trust and endurance of the family that just might be Everyfamily" (162).

Through the years, *Sounder* has been commented on as a "touching, realistic, and gripping tale" (Joanne Bernstein, *Books Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss*, 135). "*Sounder* is an enduring story of family relationships," stated Tway (161). "It shows the underlying realities of human nature; and these enduring realities are recognizable whatever the context" (Townsend, 1974, 275). All of these sentiments; realism, family relations, and human nature, are easily teachable themes and concepts that make the book appropriate for a school setting.

Nancy Huse, a college professor, took an original liking to the book in 1969. "Most of those who welcomed *Sounder* in 1969 and created the context in which it won the Newbery responded as I had to its links with classical literature and the Greek ideal" (66). On recollection, twenty years perspective, and after teaching the book in a college class, Huse feels differently. "Left out of *Sounder* are the very things which need to be said in the face of the oppression

the book depicts. Unlike the Greek tragedy it is said to resemble, the book offers no communal response to outrage" (67). However, this does occur in the movie version. The community members and neighbors "unquestionable absent from the novel," contributed to the boy's survival (Huse, 1987, 67). I agree with Huse, upon considering historical perspective and the geographical location of the story, one can accept this lack of communal support as realistic for its place and time.

Other criticism lies in the thought of a racist presence in the novel. "The book has been criticized by some who feel that the characters acceptance of their fate unfairly stereotypes blacks," commented Albert Somers in *Response Guide for Teaching Children's Books* (112). Jane Yolen had an interesting and varied perspective of Armstrong. "*Sounder* is an example of good creative outrage. Armstrong is defining his anger in literary terms, in extended allegories. He is working-out his own rage against injustice" (6). Again I feel that for an older audience, upper elementary or middle school aged students, these issues are easily addressed, discussed, and debated. The inevitable question of why and probing for the solution occurs.

"*Sounder* while eliciting a wide range of interpretation, unquestionably perpetuates, as stereotype, blacks' endless endurance of suffering, devoid and accompanying hostile emotion," said Katherine Bruner, researcher of black stereotypes (124). Bruner went on to say, "Although these stereotypes may serve a useful role by reflecting a past era, they nevertheless fertilize prejudice and seem to condone the very postures society overtly disclaims" (124).

Huse echoed these concerns.

Sounder extends existing knowledge of racism in the ante-bellum South and of the possibilities for the human mind; the

extension of such knowledge is something like waving the perennial red flag before the bull, intensifying but not enlarging or transforming their understanding of racism and human potential, and presenting a 'solution' which seems to avoid the need for widespread social change. (69)

These existing prejudices and stereotypes are what I was trying to examine in Part Two and this hypothesis was unfoundedly disproved.

Sunder does not have racial overtones, nor is it stereotypical. It is however a realistic approach to racial difference reflective of a time where such inhumane and unjust treatments occurred against Blacks. *Sunder*, and books like it, need to remain on the shelves and in school libraries. It is an excellent book to teach the concept and themes of courage, perseverance, and even loneliness.

I agree with Townsend's summation of the book. "*Sunder*, though by no means a masterpiece, is a brief, bleak book that tells an elementary story of hardship, suffering, and endurance; tells it memorably and well" (275). Its hardships are precisely the book's value.

The second author in the study is Paula fox.

PAULA FOX: *THE SLAVE DANCER*

Paula Fox, the author of *The Slave Dancer*, was born in New York, New York on April 23, 1923. Fox was not raised living with her parents. The first six years she lived with a Congregational minister and writer who was an avid historian of the American Revolution. Fox also moved extensively; she never remained in one place for more than a year before her twelfth birthday.

"Half-Spanish, half-Irish, Paula Fox went to live with her grandmother in Cuba in 1931, where she learned to speak Spanish from the children she played with" (Garret, 1989, 136). She lived on the plantation with her

grandmother for a two year period. As a result, Fox had “discovered that freedom, solace, and truth were public libraries” (Garret, 1989, 135).

Fox has been married twice. Her first marriage lasted eight years and ended when her husband became mentally ill; this would prove to be one subject of her work. She remarried on June 9, 1962. Fox attended Columbia University. She has worked as a teacher at the Ethical Culture School in New York; and has been a Professor of English Literature since 1963, simultaneously working as an author as well. She presently resides in New Jersey.

Fox has written several award winners, including the Newbery Medal in 1974 and the Hans Christian Anderson Award in 1978 for *The Slave Dancer*. *A Place Apart* won six awards, including the International Board on Books for Young People in 1985. *The Moonlight Man* received the Silver Medallion in 1987.

The Slave Dancer was a controversial Newbery winner. Critics were not questioning the issuance of the award, but they were highly critical of various aspects of the work.

The subject matter is vast in scope and implication, making the preoccupations of Paula Fox’s previous books seem quite small. It is a savage indictment of a whole society, intensely political in its overtones which ring down through the ages to the present day. (Rees, 1980, 122,)

Using this novel is an effective way to teach and inform many generations removed from such a heinous ordeal as was slavery in American history.

Alice Black stated, “The publication of *The Slave Dancer* did precipitate polemic from other quarters: A few individuals insisted that she had no business writing about a white teenager kidnapped by slave traders” (520). I disagree.

The premise for this statement included the fact the Fox could not possibly be compassionate and was too indifferent to the slave trade because of her white race. This again echoes thoughts of censorship. Are writers going to be accountable for writing only within their own race? I think not! I read numerous articles that continually emphasized and praised Fox's research and clarity of the harsh, severe, and despicable nature of the slave trade; she was entirely historically accurate in her presentation and should be commended.

Some of the sharpest criticisms came from Binnie Tate, who writes for *Interracial Books for Children*. She felt that the slaves "are completely dehumanized and that statements and incidents regarding them are prejudicial and totally unnecessary to the development of the story" (4). She further questioned the historical accuracy of the novel. Many others support her sentiments. Julius Lester felt:

The Africans are depicted as rather pathetic and dumb creatures; so much so in fact that it is difficult to have sympathy for them. The characters are nothing more than device. (8)

Jacqueline Weiss stated, as have others, "The author fails to give a name to most of the slaves, a way of depriving them of individual character" (264). Her overall assessment stated that "the book has a theme of inhumanity so grave the whole known world at times seems meaningless" (264). I feel the lack of name, ignorance of character, and dehumanizing elements were a device Fox intentionally used in order to hit the heart and soul of the reader. Better yet, the sick pit of the stomach is likely more accurate. As a reader, I felt nauseated at the conditions and inhumane treatment of the slaves. The book left an impression!

Another common derogatory element addressed, was the issue of the

protagonist, Jessie. Many critics felt his lack of action to alter or change the role of the African slaves diminished the readers' sentiments and compassion. Albert Schwartz felt Jessie's "passive role of not playing the fife- of not reacting to injustice in any meaningful way" (7) was unacceptable. "Jessie shows that he is aware of the oppression but makes no meaningful protest; he takes no stand against it. He is no model for today's young reader" (Schwartz, 1974, 6). On the other hand, Haviland stated, "Jessie is a fully realized figure, whose perceptions and agonies are presented in depth" (596). It is evident that Schwartz wanted Jessie to be the hero and fight for his beliefs. Keeping in mind Jessie's age, demeanor, and the manner in which he was treated on board ship, it is no wonder he did not act as did character Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*. The story was not an action/adventure tale, but a morbid, treacherous, nightmare for Jessie.

I would tend to disagree with most of the criticisms. I found equally as many raves for Fox's "easily most controversial work" (Garrett, 1989, 100). In a book titled, *Narratives of Love and Loss*, Margaret and Mike Rustin claimed, "Fox's achievement in this is to write with magnificent restraint and precision about the interplay of personal and historical, inner growth and outer framework, the process of learning to think about self and world" (247). The American Library Association cited it as:

a story that movingly and realistically presents one of the most gruesome chapters of history, with its violence, inhuman conditions, and bestial aspects of human nature- exposed but never exploited in this graphic, documentary prose. (484)

This is historical fiction! This is realism.

One common theme for the novel is reflected in comments presenting

Fox's writing style. Lester contradicted his own faults with the novel when he stated, "What saves this book from being a failure is the quality of writing which is consistently excellent." (8)

David Rees commented, "The distinction and beauty of the words she uses and her absolute command of subtlety and nuance in rhythms and sentence structure place Paula Fox above all other children's writers" (114). He continued that "it's an astonishing achievement that Paula Fox can use such terrifying, such adult, materials as the slave trade and turn out a *children's* book that is something like perfection" (123). "This story extends the belief that Fox is one of the most exciting writers practicing for children and young people today," responded C.S. Hannabuss, *Children's Book Reviews* (155).

Through the 1970s, people raved about Fox's work. "Fox has given us a masterpiece, the equal of which would be hard to find" (Rees, 1980, 126). Reflecting some years later on the novel, Fox felt, "writing *The Slave Dancer* was the closest I could get to events of spirit and flesh which cannot help but elude in their reality all who did not experience them" (Garrett, 1989, 102).

Virginia Hamilton is one of two Black authors studied.

VIRGINIA HAMILTON: *M.C. HIGGINS, THE GREAT*

Author of many stories including *M.C. Higgins, The Great*, "Virginia Hamilton was the first Black writer to receive the Newbery Medal" (Garrett, Vol.2, 55). Virginia Hamilton has written many notable books including *Zeely*, *The House of Dies Drear*, and *The Planet of Junior Brown*. Her other awards and honors are quite notable: Child Study Association of America's Book of the Year and the Edgar Allen Poe Award for *The House of Dies Drear*; the Best Books for *The Planet of Junior Brown*, and American Libraries Association's Best

Young Adult Books for *Sweet Whispers* and *Brother Wish*. The list truly goes on for some thirty-five more honors.

Hamilton's grandfather Levi Perry, was a slave who escaped to the North. "He grew up in one of the strongest stations of the Underground Railroad" (Hamilton, 1974, 279). Hamilton was born in Yellow Springs, Ohio, part of the Miami Valley. "By the time she finished high school and received a full scholarship to Antioch College In Yellow Springs, she had absorbed the traditional lore and the storytelling inclinations of the Perry clan, undergone the stimulating influence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and became aware of her personal ambition to be a writer" (Kingman, 1976, 138).

Hamilton left Ohio to go to New York where she met her husband, Arnold Adoff, who was also an author and an anthologist. Eventually Hamilton returned to Yellow Springs with her husband and two children after spending many years in New York City.

In regards to her writing, Hamilton said, "I place no kind of restriction about whom or what I write about; writers must remain free to write as readers must have freedom of choice in order to read" (Chevalier, 1989, 423). She has also stated that she, "attempts to recognize the unquenchable spirit which I know exists in my race and in other races in order to rediscover a universality within myself" (Hamilton, 1975, 120).

Unlike the examination of *Sounder* and *The Slave Dancer*, I had to dig to find negative criticisms on *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. The favorable comments for the story were many, and far outnumbered derogatory ones.

"Hamilton is one of five black authors who has made a substantial contribution to the image of Afro-Americans in children's fiction that has appeared since 1965," commented Jan Dressel, in *The English Journal* (42).

This premise was reiterated in *Black Writers*: "Virginia Hamilton is one of the most prolific and influential authors of books about black children" (243).

"Hamilton attempts to reflect the uniqueness as well as the universality of the Afro-American experience from an Afro-American perspective" (Dressel, 1984, 42).

Many others feel that she is an accomplished writer with great skill and talent. Paul Heins, of *Hornbook Magazine*, stated, "Virginia Hamilton is not a strictly realistic writer, although the base of her operations may be said to be realism... Actually, she overcomes the bonds of sordid reality. Her imagination, spilling over into metaphors and symbols, is a liberating force" (81). (Of course, if taught in a classroom setting, symbolism must be addressed. As I stated in Part Two, the supernatural and spiritual elements are likely out of grasp for a younger reader.)

Let me share one final positive boast for the writing of Ms. Hamilton; this statement I found to be the most compelling and compassionate as stated in an editorial, by Jane Langton:

I find it baffling to describe the strength and rightness of her style. There is no weakening of the spell anywhere. Like a magician or prestidigitator, she leaves you levitated, sawed in half, and put back together- partially transformed. Like a sorcerer, she inhabits you with spirits. And they remain. The demon spell works for good. After reading, you do not altogether get yourself back. (672)

This is powerful praise for any writer; Virginia Hamilton should be proud.

In terms of specific comments for the novel, Kathleen Scholl wrote, "Not only was the author able to convey a portion of black experience authentically, but she was able to do this in language and in narrative style that gives a reader

a strong feeling for M.C.'s speech and his way of thinking" (420). This can be a deterrent as well. M.C. is slow and methodical, which may inhibit some readers.

A vivid setting is created in the story that imprints and activates the reader's imagination. The characters, specifically the dude and Banina, are easily visualized by the reader.

All of the characters have vitality and credibility as well as a unique quality that makes them unforgettable. All of the themes are handled contrapuntally to create a memorable picture of a young boy's growing awareness of himself and his surroundings. (Robinson, 1974, 143)

The biggest detriment to this novel as seen by many others, is the beginning and introduction. Nicholas Tucker felt just so:

Virginia Hamilton writes in heavy but compelling prose. Characters lumber rather than leap from the page, but once in focus they make their mark. Surely, for most young readers, the opening of the book is almost impenetrable, little use for any child accustomed to giving up after the first difficult page. (766)

It is evident that David Russell did not view the pace as a hindrance but as a necessary tool of the novel: "The lack of momentum in the plot line is appropriately suggestive of M.C. Higgins' own inability to act- an inability he must overcome in order to join the ranks of the survivors" (45).

Scholl's feelings were different. "Clearly some young readers, particularly white, middle-class ones, may find themselves at a loss in trying to cope with an unfamiliar writing style, unfamiliar cultural group, and unfamiliar location all at the same time" (422). This thought concerns me. *One* would be labeled or considered racist or prejudiced if the statement were reversed, and suggested that language, geography, and culture, were the reasons why a

Black student could not comprehend or appreciate a novel written by a white author or about white society.

Tracy Chevalier had a much better perspective. "*M.C. Higgins, The Great* is a country book, with slow-gathering but inevitable power, natural imagery, and homemade music" (423). Maybe she should point out to Scholl, that "the pictures and the relationships and the sounds that fit together here, deepen in perspective with each reading" (423).

"The beauty of the writing, the poetic imagery, the characters, each unique yet completely believable, and the original themes all make the reading of this book an unforgettable experience" (Vassallo, 1975, 195). Zena Sutherland felt favorably as well. "The characterization, the creation of setting, the establishment of mood, and the writing style are all superb" (63).

Of the five novels studied, this one I did not enjoy. I too found the beginning a slog to get through. The pace was so deliberate; I wanted more movements and action. However, as noted by others, these faults I find with the novel are precisely its value to others.

One final positive note, "This is not an adorable book, not a lived-happily-ever-after kind of story. It is warm, humane, and hopeful and does what every book should do- creates characters with whom we can identify and for whom we care" Linda Metzger, *Black Writers*, (244).

The fourth author studied was Katherine Paterson.

KATHERINE PATERSON: *THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS*

Katherine Paterson is equally well-known in children's literature. Paterson was born in Jiangsu, China, on October 31, 1932. Paterson too lived a transient childhood, moving over fifteen times from the age of five to eighteen.

(Her father was in the military. In addition to moving about, she was a refugee during two different time periods of her childhood while trying to return to and from the United States to China.

Paterson was a *summa cum laude* graduate of King College, and continued with the MA at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. (Both her father and her husband are clergymen). Her career began as an elementary school teacher in Virginia until she decided to become a missionary to Japan in the late 1950s.

She later returned to the States and was married. She then took a job teaching English and Sacred Studies at Pennington School for Boys in New Jersey. During this time she first wrote for church publication and joined the Writers' Guild in 1964. She currently lives in Vermont.

Her honors and awards, which exceed fifty, clearly provide evidence of her value as an author. "No matter how good the writing may be a book is never complete until it is read, said Paterson" (Garret, Vol. 1, 210).

The Great Gilly Hopkins received numerous awards itself; including the Christopher award, 1978, the National Book Award, 1979, and in 1981, the William Allen White Award and the Garden State Children's Book Award.

The Great Gilly Hopkins has, "a well structured story, vitality of writing style, natural dialogue, deep insight of characterization, and a keen sense of the fluid dynamics of human relationships" (Sutherland, 1978, 147). The story is about, "real issues confronting real people- prejudice, theft, self-preservation" (Bernstein, 1983, 319). The story uses "realistic dialogue, has believable and humorous writing, and has a broad array of unorthodox characters," writes Jack Forman in *The School Library Journal* (87).

The characters from this novel have been raved about too. Sutherland commented, "Paterson's development of the change in Gilly is brilliant and touching, as she depicts a child whose tough protective shield dissolves as she learns to accept love and to give it" (147).

Natalie Babbitt, an award winning children's author, stated,

Gilly is a bully, a thief; and yet, because Paterson is interested in motivations rather than moralizing, the reader is freed to grow very fond of her heroine- to sympathize, to understand, to identify with Gilly, and to laugh with her. (1)

Eden Edwards provided a wonderful summation of the main character Gilly.

Paterson provides moments of pure comedy through the manipulations and wisecracks of this sharp-tongued, precocious protagonist who willfully steers her own progression through a series of foster homes, keeping all intimate relationships at bay until the most unlikely character- the overweight, almost illiterate, 'religious fanatic' foster mother, Maime Trotter- wins her love. (165)

The character Galadriel Hopkins is what truly makes this story fun, humorous, touching, and moving. Sutherland, Babbitt, and Edwards, are all quite accurate in their assessments of Gilly. Paterson has created a character whom the reader never has to ask, "What happened when she was six?" "Where was Gilly before the story started?" The reader meets Gilly and grows to become her friend as do the characters Trotter, W.E., and Mr. Randolph.

Some of the greatest criticisms for the book address the book's ending. "Her books are sometimes banned in schools and libraries on the grounds that her stories contain unhappy endings and realistic language" (Foerstel, 1994, 124). It is clear that when Gilly finally met her mother that the relationship would

not materialize into the fantasy Gilly had been contriving throughout the story; however, the ending was real. "The story seems to have necessities and its own ending... If you try to change what is the inevitable ending of that story, you violate the story and the reader will recognize that" (Foerstel, 1994, 124). Do we censor the ending so it fits in a box with a bow? No, Paterson's choice to conclude with Gilly leaving with her grandmother was most apropos. "Not the ideal ending, but neither is life ideal" (Bernstein, 1983, 319).

In addition to the complaints about the language and the conclusion of the story, another criticism that was voiced by a few critics supported the statement that, "it's hard to accept the exaggeration of Trotter's virtues, the implication that ignorance plus slovenliness equals motherly love" (Mercier, 1978, 127).

Paterson had much to say about the novel and censoring.

I can't imagine Gilly Hopkins being Gilly Hopkins without the language she uses. You don't have a child who is so angry at the world, and who lies and steals and bullies, whose mouth doesn't somehow reflect that anger. (Foerstel, 1994, 127)

When Paterson was asked if she had been pressured to change her writing she commented:

I have received no pressure from my publishers or editors. I'm totally free to write exactly the way I want to write. I put the book out, and when the challenge arises, it's the teachers and the librarians who have to put their jobs and reputations on the line to defend what I've done. (Foerstel, 1994, 124)

Clearly Katherine Paterson will continue to write realistic children's novels that portray characters as she sees them and will not succumb to pressures from groups or individuals who would prefer that her work be altered

or even eliminated from children's reading collections.

The Great Gilly Hopkins is another book that I teach in my class. I have the support of my department, building, and school board, as the book has been approved for the sixth grade. As for the language issues surrounding the book, I address them before we read the book and explain that voice is part of the character Gilly. The first student who reads the word "damn" is usually uncomfortable or may choose to substitute the word, but most students appear to feel "grown-up" as though they are mature enough to handle the vocabulary. After the first few times words appear, everyone relaxes and they lose their novelty.

The fifth and final author examined was Mildred Taylor.

MILDRED TAYLOR: *ROLL OF THUNDER, HEAR MY CRY*

The author of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, moved three months after her birth, in 1943¹⁰ from Jackson Mississippi, because "her father had been involved in a racial incident" (Kingman, 1986, 31) to Toledo, Ohio. During this time, life was more promising in the North for Blacks than in the South.

In high school Taylor was quite active as a class officer, an honor society member, and editor of the school newspaper. "She often found herself the only Black student in the college preparatory courses and because of this she competed all the harder" (Kingman, 1986, 32). She attended college at the University of Toledo and became a History and English teacher in Ethiopia as part of the Peace Corps. When she returned to the U.S., she attend the University of Colorado and became a journalist.

Taylor finally began to focus on her writing; she had known since she

¹⁰ Three different sources gave her birth year, none gave a date or month. It is likely that the birth took place at home and record keeping was not felt to be necessary.

was nine years old that she wanted to be a writer. In 1973, Taylor won first prize in the African-American category of a competition sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children. She has twice won the Coretta Scott King Award and in 1988 she received the Children's Book Council Award.

Taylor commented in her acceptance speech for the Newbery Award for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the second book in a sequel to *Song of the Trees*, that,

I will continue the Logan's story... for it is my hope that these four books, one of the first chronicles to mirror a black child's hopes and fears from childhood innocence to awareness to bitterness and disillusionment, will one day be instrumental in teaching children of all colors the tremendous influence that Cassie's generation - my father's generation- had in bringing about the Great Civil Rights Movement of the fifties and sixties. (Holtze, 1983, 308)

Many writers and critics have looked at Taylor's work. I feel her own assessment of her work to be enlightening.

My fictions for young people derive from the progress of Black adults and their children across the American hopescape. Occasionally, they are light-hearted; often they are speculative, symbolic and dark, and brooding. The people are always uneasy because the ideological difference they feel from the majority is directly derived from heritage. (Hamilton, 1981, 638)

Later she stated,

I included the teachings of my own childhood, the values and principles by which I and so many other Black children were reared, for I wanted to show a family united in love and self-respect, and parents, strong and sensitive, attempting to guide their children successfully, without harming their

spirits, through the hazardous maze of living in a discriminatory society. (Metzger, 1989, 539)

In addition to reflecting on her own writing, she made the following observation of Paula Fox and *The Slave Dancer*. Taylor stated that it was “the finest example of a historical anthology by an American writer” (Rees, 1980, 104).

Taylor’s material is also raved over and the epitome of excellence in writing from the Black historical perspective. “Upon examining the works of Mildred Taylor, one cannot fail to be inspired by her unusually cohesive and consistent approach to historical writing for young people,” commented Tracy Chevalier in *20th Century Writers* (951). Rees agreed:

She is excellent on the *effects* of racial prejudice. She may not analyze in depth motives behind the actions of her white characters, but their nastiness, their selfishness and greed, and their inability to see blacks as human beings, come over vividly to the reader. (108)

Her writing is superb. “A *natural writer* is an overused expression I don’t particularly like, but in speaking of Mildred Taylor it seems absolutely appropriate. Mildred’s words flow smoothly, effortlessly, it seems, and they abound in richness, harmony, and rhythm” (Kingman, 1986, 31).

“Her material reflects her experiences growing up in a racially biased America” (Metzger, 1989, 539). Smith stated, “Taylor makes the reader aware of the ravages of racism in education, in economics, in the justice system, and in frequently humiliating social interactions” (7). “The stories offer a moving and honest perspective on the perils and joys of black family life, primarily in Mississippi” (Chevalier, 1989, 951). Chevalier further stated,

The stories are clear-cut, easy to follow but never simplistic.

The reader is always left to muse and indeed wonder at human action, inaction and the far-reaching effects of these factors may have upon the lives of others. (951)

She is also known for her ability to present a female as the hero. "It is the women who, with indomitable strength and dignity, more vividly portray confrontation and negotiation" (Tway, 1981, 126). "Taylor introduces readers to a family whose strength is built on positive self-esteem, courage, and a steadfast belief in holding on to what is yours, no matter what" (Smith, 1989, 7).

"Its only weakness is that Taylor seems uncertain about how much she can involve children in areas that are the preserve of the adults" (Rees, 1980, 108). He made reference to eavesdropping, peeking through keyholes, and over-hearing events that the child characters were not directly involved with.

"She has provided us with important vignettes from an unforgettable era, which stands as classics in the genre of American historical fiction for children" (Chevalier, 1989, 952). "It does for its period and place what Laura Ingalls Wilder did for the pioneers" (Payne, 1978, 47).

I feel the novel is best read silently where ideas can be slowly mulled over and reconsidered. The reading level is about grade four and as such, prompts for symbols and metaphors would likely support and build on the novel.

This book is used at my building in block seventh grade Social Studies/ Language Arts classes. It is being read aloud. It may be surprising, but Cassie Logan's life has drawn the students in, and the story is helping tremendously to build background and develop the Social Studies curriculum.

In addition to examining the authors' backgrounds and book reviews, I surveyed my sixth grade classes. (See Appendix B for sample survey). The results are as follows.

READERSHIP: WHO AND WHAT IS SELECTED?

I have 124 students, and the day that I gave the survey, forty-five girls and fifty-seven boys took it. I randomly pulled two of the boys' surveys from the pile so that the numbers would be equal to one hundred. The students who responded come from a wide range of academic backgrounds, including one class of team-taught special education students. I have only four percent African American students in my classes, one of whom was not present for the survey. There is one Oriental American and two Native Americans.¹¹ The community that I teach in pulls from a sixty square mile radius and thus includes a vast array of social and economic backgrounds.

The results of the survey were not shocking or extremely revealing. The responses were frank. The total percentages may not be equal to one hundred, for in some instances, students chose not to respond, and in others, they may have cited two responses.

The favorite author for my sixth grade students came as no surprise to me; in fact, I only allow one book report to be presented on a book by this author so that the students can expand upon the types of novels they are reading. Although many students read only his works for D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything And Read). You may have guessed it too, and the winner is... R.L. Stine.

Of the students who claimed to know what the Newbery Award was, the majority said it was a "good book." Some other responses included, "a book people liked," "best children's novel," "the author did a good job writing it," "best illustrator," "gold or silver star on the book," and one person said, "the most distinguished."

¹¹ There may be others; however, these students have expressed themselves as such.

When asked to name other winners, some were stated, *Julie of the Wolves*, *Walk Two Moons*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Missing May*, *Maniac Magee*, and *Sarah Plain and Tall*. Others that were mentioned were Caldecott Award winners, for the best illustrated children's book of the year, *The Polar Express*. Other titles were mentioned although not correctly. For example, *The Pearl of Black Harbor*, I believe the student meant *The Black Pearl* by Scott O'Dell. Another one was *The Lion of the Children* ;I suspect the student meant, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis.

TABLE 1. FAVORITE AUTHORS LIST

GIRLS:

R.L. Stein	40%
J. Blume, B. Cleary, A. Martin, C. Pike, & S. Silverstein were each	4%
Walter Farley and Jo Gibson (two authors I'm unfamiliar with) each	2%

BOYS:

R.L. Stein	49%
S. King, B. Coverwell, E.B. White, & P. Reynolds Naylor, each	1%
M. Christopher	3%
Gary Larson.....	11%

The information contained in Table 2. is extremely valuable. It supports the fact that books about blacks are not being as widely read as those with white characters. Is this because the racial make-up of the students in my survey was predominantly white? Is it because the majority of authors are white and are therefore writing about white experiences? Is it because students want to read about their own experiences and therefore do not select books with Blacks or other non-whites as main characters? Clearly, further examination into the reasoning for the students' responses is needed to adequately and

effectively arrive at a concrete decision.

**TABLE 2. BOOKS READ WITH NON-WHITES AS MAIN
CHARACTERS**

# OF BOOKS READ	BOYS	GIRLS
1-5	65%	64%
6-10	16%	20%
11-15	4%	2%
15+	4%	9%

I find the results of Table 3 to be quite typical. Boys want action and adventure and girls enjoy fantasy. I had anticipated that more students would have enjoyed historical fiction such as the *Anne of Green Gables* series or *Little House on the Prairie*. Yet, with R.L. Stein as their favorite author, I suppose I should have included mystery and suspense in the questionnaire.

TABLE 3. TYPES OF FICTION PREFERRED

TYPE OF FICTION	BOYS	GIRLS
Action/adventure	71%	47%
Fantasy	16%	31%
Realistic Fiction	18%	16%
Historical Fiction	4%	9%

I had one student "write in" instructional book of guides.

The results on Table 4. were disappointing. I believed, as I stated earlier, that due to the notoriety of the Newbery Award, that these books would be popular. Is it because they are not current and recently published? Is it because our libraries carry the original printing of the books and they are

severely worn and do not have an updated book jacket to appeal to a fresh audience? Is it because the characters on the book jackets are showing Blacks? Again these questions are unanswered.

TABLE 4. STUDENTS WHO HAVE READ 1970 NEWBERY BOOKS		
BOOK TITLE	BOYS	GIRLS
<i>Souder</i>	9%	6%
<i>Roll of Thunder hear My Cry</i>	0%	4%
<i>M.C. Higgins, the Great</i>	0%	9%
<i>The Slave Dancer</i>	11%	9%
<i>The Great Gilly Hopkins</i>	9%	9%

The questions from Table 5 were designed in order to get an overall view of my students' perspective. How they feel about reading, what their interests are and what they are selecting to read. I was not surprised to learn that girls enjoy reading for pleasure more than boys do; nor was I surprised to discover that girls enjoy reading about stories that are close to their own lives. This generally holds true in students' writings as well. Boys will write about adventures and activities they are familiar with but do not necessarily take part in and girls at this age, tend to stick to the babysitting, boy chasing, and young romance ideas.

The one fact that concerns me is the 20% difference between the percentage of boys who have read a book by an African American and the percentage of girls who have read them. I wonder if the boys included a short story written by Bill Cosby in our Literature book as counting in the survey.

The other item that I felt the percentage should have been greater on was the one concerning selecting a book with a seal. It is possible that I do this as an adult and as a teacher, because I know the meaning of the seals; as further

results will show, the students generally do not.

TABLE 5. GENERAL FINDINGS BY GENDER

ITEM	BOYS	GIRLS
Yes, I enjoy reading for pleasure.	71%	80%
Yes, the gender of the author is important.	9%	0%
Yes, I have read a book written by a Native American.	24%	26%
Yes, I have read a book written by an African American.	60%	40%
Yes, I have heard of the Newbery Award.	71%	82%
Yes, I would select a book because it had a seal.	45%	36%
Yes, I want to read books that are similar to my life.	58%	71%
Yes, I enjoy reading about unfamiliar or different places.	87%	80%
Yes, I find reading about different regions or dialects more difficult to read.	52%	56%

TABLE 6. FREQUENCY OF PARENT READING

DAYS READING	BOYS	GIRLS
Everyday	67%	51%
Four or five days a week	16%	22%
Once a week	15%	20%
Never ¹²	4%	2%

There is a 10% gap between the amount of reading that boys and girls see modeled at home. Girls see 10% less reading in the home four or more days a week than do boys. Again the results could be skewed. Without falling into stereotyping or over-generalizing, one could fairly and safely presume that teenage girls are socializing on the phone, as boys are interested in computers,

¹² I knew that I had one student living in an illiterate household, these results show two additional.

video games, and television, but what messages are parents sending their children? It is difficult to imagine and even comprehend living or coming from a household where no one reads or where they only read once a week.

At the close of the survey I asked the students to respond to what should be included in books for children and young adults. Overwhelmingly, both girls and boys wanted action and more adventure. Some wanted better endings, material on how to grow up, no violence, mystery, and one wanted to know how the characters were living before the start of the book. I have provided several quotes that I feel are especially interesting or funny, or merely present the child's point of view.

TABLE 7. STUDENT STATEMENTS FOR INCLUSION IN BOOKS

"I think authors should included things like how bad it is to drink, smoke, and smoke pot" (Crystal).

"I think hard situations like divorce and adoption should be included in books" (Josh).

"I think they should try to scare you as hard as they can" (Kurt).

"No vilence [violence] but alot [a lot] of adventure" (Jamie).

"I think that many different things should be included in books, because all people are different and enjoy different things" (Kristie).

"I think a that a child should be abal [able] to decide whether the book is good or not" (John).

"fun things, teaches a good lesson, colorful attractive cover, good storyline"

"I want horror, not like Goosebumps, but something that will really frighten you like Stephen King" (Brandon).

"I think they should have not very many crims [crimes] in a childrens book and I think a young adults book should have the chapters only 4 or 5 pages long not 7 or 10" (Danielle).

"I think some of the books should be more exciting and I think all books should have a contencz [conscience]" (Nathan).

"I think reel [real] life experiences can be recognized more and you would feel like you are in that sicuation [situation] and we will understand the themes" (Jeremy).

"Adults [books] should be boring just for the first page. Childrens [books] should start out exciting then get dull and boring" (Leanne).

"I think that there should be stuff that is similar to real life or stuff that can happen in real life" (William).

"adventure, scary stuff, fansty [fantasy] things & maybe a little sicence [science] fiction" (Laura).

CONCLUSION

“Because our values and belief systems are formed at an early age, it is essential that children be exposed to good literature that celebrates diversity and helps to alleviate the intolerance, prejudice, and injustice suffered by many ethnic groups” (Rasinski, 1991, 161). I believe and support Binnie Tate’s statement that “young children deserve a *fair* and *accurate* picture of the Black experience, even in a work of fiction” (4).

Since these Newbery winning authors are writing for children, I also believe that they have a responsibility to the audience. By continuing to develop and write stories that use negative images of another ethnic group, the young reader may assimilate the values and messages within the text.

There are many reasons to continue to use literature. “It widens a child’s world by providing a chance to participate through story in new experiences, meet new people, go new places, and see new things” (Hickman, 1989, 4). “Using historical fiction in the classroom stimulates in depth investigation of historical time periods; it provides role models for students, and gives them opportunities to exercise judgment and decision making” (Hickman, 1989, 176).

Historical fiction should continue to play a role in children’s literature and in children’s libraries. As should realistic fictions that may appear to present information that is biased, on further glance and examination, the true meaning will surface.

EPILOGUE

“Although we do not all share the same history, culture, or experiences, it is important to learn about others’ histories, cultures, and experiences” (Hornbook, 1990, 781). We must provide students and children with powerful reading experiences. All of these 1970s Newbery winning books do just that. They engage the reader. They make the reader stop, think, reflect, and question society and the past. All of these books are of value and should remain part of the instruction and pleasure reading libraries.

It is most pertinent to start when people are children so that they may develop values and beliefs that do not conform to the white dominant culture but ones that are multi-culturally based. Until the individual begins to alter his or her own beliefs and values, the normative culture will remain unchanged. Adults are more likely to have difficulty doing just this since thoughts, feelings, and emotions are often ingrained in their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

By beginning with oneself and slowly changing the Black ideologies that have been so inaccurate for centuries, hopefully with time, patience, and understanding, the African idiom will be dissolved. As a result, individuals reading these novels will be able to decipher fact from fiction in terms of the racial bias and stereotypes that are fabricated and will not continue to believe these idioms represented. Hopefully a culmination of these changes will encourage the authors to begin to present realistic, successful, and positive images of Blacks in children’s literature.

Children should be allowed access to all reading materials with guidance from librarians, teachers, and parents. All books need to remain on the shelves and remain available for others. Censoring is not the answer to protecting our children from racism or ethnic bias, for then we are biased ourselves.

APPENDIX A¹³

STATEMENT OF CENSORSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

I. Statement

Teachers of English language arts must make daily decisions about materials and methods of instruction, choosing from increasingly broad and varied alternatives in order to serve students who are themselves increasingly diverse, both linguistically and culturally. Guidelines help teachers of English language arts to make those decisions. NCTE advocates and supports guidelines that help teachers avoid censorship. NCTE opposes censorship wherever it appears.

II. Distinctions between Censorship and Professional Guidelines

Censorship and guidelines sometimes appear similar because both involve selection from myriad alternatives. However, censorship and professional guidelines may be distinguished one from the other. Whereas the goal of censorship is to remove, eliminate or bar particular materials and methods, the goal of professional guidelines is to provide criteria for selection of materials and methods.

III. Censorship Distinguished from Professional Guidelines: Examples

Examples of Censorship	Examples of Professional Guidelines
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exclude Specific Materials or Methods <i>Example:</i> Eliminate books with unhappy endings. 2. Are Essentially Negative <i>Example:</i> Review your classroom library and eliminate books that include stereotypes. 3. Intend to Control <i>Example:</i> Do not accept <i>policeman</i>. Insist that students say and write <i>police officer</i>. 4. Seek to Indoctrinate, to Limit Access to Ideas and Information <i>Example:</i> Drug abuse is a menace to students. Eliminate all books that portray drug abuse. 5. Look at Parts of a Work in Isolation <i>Example:</i> Remove this book. The language includes profanity. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include Specific Materials or Methods <i>Example:</i> Include some books with unhappy endings to give a varied view of life. 2. Are Essentially Affirmative <i>Example:</i> Review your classroom library. If necessary, add books that portray groups in nonstereotypical ways. 3. Intend to Advise <i>Example:</i> Encourage such nonlimiting alternatives for <i>policeman</i> as <i>police officer</i>, <i>officer of the law</i> or <i>law enforcer</i>. 4. Seek to Educate, to Increase Access to Ideas and Information <i>Example:</i> Include at appropriate grade levels books that will help students understand the personal and social consequences of drug abuse. 5. See the Relationship of Parts to Each Other and to a Work as a Whole <i>Example:</i> Determine whether the profanity is integral to portrayal of character and development of theme in the book.

¹³ Taken from *The Connecticut English Journal*, Vol. 15, 1993.

**APPENDIX B:
STUDENT SURVEY**

NAME: _____

1. Who is your favorite author? _____
2. Do you read books written by both men and women? Yes _____ No _____
3. Does the gender of the author matter to you? Yes _____ No _____
4. Would you read a book by an unfamiliar author? Yes _____ No _____
5. Have you read a book written by a Native American? Yes _____ No _____
6. Have you read a book written by an African American? Yes _____ No _____
7. About how many books have you read where the main characters were of a race other than white? 1-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 15 or more _____
8. What types of book do you enjoy the most?
Action adventure _____ Fantasy _____ Realistic Fiction _____ Historical
Fiction _____
9. Have your read any of the follow books?

<i>Souder</i>	Yes _____	No _____
<i>Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry</i>	Yes _____	No _____
<i>M.C. Higgins</i>	Yes _____	No _____
<i>The Slave Dancer</i>	Yes _____	No _____
<i>The Great Gilly Hopkins</i> (Don't count when we read it).	Yes _____	No _____

10. Have you heard of the Newbery Award? Yes _____ No _____

11. Do you know what the award means? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, explain it _____

12. Would you select a book because it had an award seal on the cover?

Yes _____ No _____

13. Can you name any other books winning the Newbery Award? _____

14. Do you enjoy books that are similar to how you live your life and act?

Yes _____ No _____

15. Do you like books that take you to an unfamiliar place?

Yes _____ No _____

16. Are different dialects or regional stories more difficult to read?

Yes _____ No _____

17. About how many books do you read in a year? _____

18. How often do your parents or guardians read? (newspapers, books, magazines) Every day _____ At least 4/5 days a week _____ Maybe once a week _____ None _____

19. Do you like to read for pleasure or enjoyment?

Yes _____ No _____

20. What do you think should be included in children's and young adult books? _____

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